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INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

Greece- With the diktat accepted by the Greek government, all workers in Europe have suffered a defeat

This statement was issued by the Bureau of the Fourth International on 12 August 2015.

The signature by the Tsipras government of the agreement demanded by the Troika and the installation of a third memorandum in Greece represents an undeniable victory for the capitalist forces in Europe.

This signature is a rejection of the mandate given by the Greek people through the massive NO in the referendum of 5 July. In that referendum, a class vote unambiguously rejected the project agreement demanded by the Troika. This vote was a strong expression of the rejection of the policies of austerity and poverty that had been implemented by the two first memoranda by conservative and social democratic parties, a rejection which had already led to the victory of Syriza in January.

This about-face was apparent immediately after the referendum. Tsipras, to comply with the demands of the Eurogroup negotiators drafted a declaration of national unity with the parties subservient to the Troika (New Democracy, PASOK and To Potami) who had just been repudiated at the ballot box.

The agreement accepted a few days later was even more devastating for the Greek population than the one rejected on 5 July. The European Union, the ECB and the conservative and social democrat European governments imposed an agreement dismantling what is left of social rights and establishing a real colonial tutelage by removing any sovereign decision-making from Greek national institutions. The creation of a privatization agency of Greek public goods under direct control of creditors is stepping up the selling off piece by piece of the national heritage.

Resistance to such surrender was expressed after the announcement of the draft agreement by the Left platform of Syriza, a majority of members of the CC, other left forces engaged in the battle of the NO - including Antarsya activists, and many trade union reactions. The protest also involved street demonstrations, which were violently suppressed by the government and several activists were beaten, attacked by the anti-riot police, prosecuted and convicted in court simply for having demanding respect of popular decisions. These police exactions, worthy of the time of Samaras, have been supported by Tsipras and his new government.

The violence of the offensive launched by the leaders of the European Union is proportionate to what is at stake: to prove, despite the democratic choice of the Greek people, that no alternative to austerity plans laid down by the European ruling class exists within Europe. One thing (above all) is clear now if it was not clear before. That is that it is impossible for a radical left government to oppose austerity inside the Eurozone today unless it is prepared to exit the Euro or be expelled from it.

By linking Greece's membership of the European Union to the respect of these dictates the true nature of this Union is illuminated: an anti-democratic construction, outside popular control and not at all aiming for upward harmonization of the economic and social situation of European populations. Its sole purpose, confirmed by the evolution of economies since 2002, is the establishment of market and monetary support for the exporting economies of the Northern countries, concretized by the deconstruction of the social rights won in every national space and endless austerity. Monetary stability has been accompanied by wage devaluation. The construction of Europe, constrained by the treaties of Maastricht and Lisbon, "written in stone", appears as a framework that cannot be challenged by any popular choice.

The perspective opened in January 2015 was not that the Greek people would decide to cut themselves off from the other peoples of Europe, but did call into question and break with the rules of the Union. This could be a powerful hammer blows to a structure that cannot be brought down other than by the mobilization of the whole of European populations.

Capitalist European leaders, both conservatives and Social Democrats, have never accepted the establishment of a government whose programme is an end to austerity policies and memoranda. Syriza was a clear alternative to the policies pursued by the ND of Samaras and previously by PASOK. Its election programme clearly expressed the will to challenge the dictates of the Troika. In that respect, this political experience represented a chance for the workers, in Greece and throughout Europe, to demonstrate the possibility that a political party based on an anti-austerity programme assert itself strongly, impose itself against the reactionary parties and follow a path breaking with the demands of the European capitalists.

But the months which have just passed showed that to meet such a challenge, they had to be ready for a class against class clash within Greece and also with the European ruling class, its proto-State and its banks, by challenging the illegitimate debt, the institutions and the treaties of the European Union.

The Tsipras team wanted to succeed in an impossible bet: put an end to austerity in Greece while complying with the rules of the European Union and the schedule of debt repayment.

By taking responsibility for the debts incurred by previous Governments and continuing in the past six months to pay more than EUR 7 billion to the ECB and the IMF, by accepting the injection of funds from emergency assistance (ELA), the Greek Government has not loosened the noose tied around the neck of the Greek people by the Troika. Yet the audit requested by the Vouli (parliament) has demonstrated that odious and illegitimate debt and had elicited the demand by many Greek MPs for immediate cessation of payment. But Tsipras refused to stop the payment of the debt, refused to block the flight of capital and refused to nationalize banks and the Greek Central Bank, the only ways to really take control of the banking system.

The argument for this policy and ultimately accepting such a surrender is that this path was the only one possible to avoid suffocation of the Greek banks and bankruptcy of the country, to avoid the Grexit. Tsipras said that there was no alternative to such a choice. In recent weeks against opponents from left, he constantly put forward the argument of the currency: reject the dictates and the capitulation would, according to him, have pushed the Greece out of the Euro zone, or even of the European Union. During the legislative campaign, Syriza had as a slogan "no sacrifice for the euro".

The Euro and the ECB rules of the Maastricht Treaty, with the debt, were used as a second noose to strangle the Greek people.

Avoid the Grexit, used as a threat against Greece by all European Governments, became the Tsipras government's absolute priority, forcing it to put aside any aggressive policy on the issue of debt and the implementation of Syriza's anti-austerity programme. The refusal to leave the euro zone has become a categorical imperative.

Yet, for several months, and particularly during the campaign for the NO in the referendum, the Greek left and including the Syriza Left Platform, advanced clear proposals for another policy, a line of confrontation and breaking with the leadership and the rules of the European Union.

These alternative choices emphasize social control through the nationalization of the banking system, unilateral suspension of debt repayments, blocking the flight of capital, an end to privatization, the immediate application of the social measures provided for by the declaration of Thessaloniki. Within the framework carrying out these measures which requires a battle against the Greek oligarchy and its privileges, a process of rupture with the European institutions should and must be prepared, and, given the dictates of the Troika, the preparation of leaving the Eurozone.

Such a policy followed consciously could rely on mobilization and massive support in the country, made possible by the immediate implementation of social measures for the working classes. Making staying in the Eurozone an impassable frontier serves mainly as a pretext for the lack of implementation of urgent economic and social measures. In conclusion, Tsipras choices lead to continuing subjection of the Greek people to a much more dramatic social situation than the one they would face on leaving the Eurozone.

The page of confrontations has not been turned in Greece

The Syriza Left Platform will fight in the coming weeks to prevent Troika winning another victory by shattering this party and its accumulated experience. And all of the anti-capitalist Greeks, in and outside of Syriza will have to find the paths of the counter-offensive, based on the experience of the united-front committees for the OXI. This concerns first of all the forces of Syriza who oppose the path taken by Tsipras, and those of Antarsya. This concerns also all the forces of the trade-union movement and the whole of the social movement which has acted on this line. The KKE, from the establishment of the Government in January, frontally sabotaged any joint action of anti-austerity forces. The other forces of the Greek left do not accept this situation which, today as yesterday, represents an obstacle to creating a single front fighting austerity.

The development of the Greek situation issues a challenge to all those who want to oppose the capitalist forces in Europe. The signal is clear: there can be no challenge to the austerity policies suffered by workers without confrontation, without a process of rupture with the institutions of the European Union, and without the prospect of a Europe at the service of workers and peoples.

Agreeing to the framework laid down by the treaties, hoping to be able to negotiate a reasonable agreement with the institutions is synonymous with submission to the demands of the ECB and the Commission. There cannot be any illusion on margins of manoeuvre at this level, based on possible support from the social democratic parties, or at least the hope they will take their distance from the most reactionary policies. The last few weeks have shown that Social Democrats leaders ignored the choice of the Greek people as much as their conservative colleagues. All these political forces have chimed in. Worse, the official leadership of the European Trade Union Confederation had also lined up alongside Greece's "creditors", without any alternative voice within it.

The Greek experience is a challenge in the first place to the left in the Spanish State, where the rise of Podemos was parallel to and stimulated by that of Syriza. But it also appeals to the whole of the European labour movement.

Everyone understands that the capitalists' agenda in Europe is more austerity, fewer jobs, less pay, fewer social rights. It is vital that failure of the phase which has just ended in Greece does not lead to abandoning any political perspective of radical challenge to austerity policies, or a refusal to advocate the cancellation of the illegitimate debt, a "realpolitik" avoiding the obstacle. This would leave as alternative to the conservative and social democratic policies only nationalist, chauvinist, far-right solutions that are just as devastating for social rights.

To flout the democratic choice of the Greek people, the ECB and the Eurogroup set themselves up as a European Government purporting to act on behalf of peoples. This simply showed up the total absence of legitimacy and democracy of the European institutions. Noting this obvious [weakness] forced takeover, some like Jacques Delors or François Hollande, propose the creation of a Government or Parliament of the euro zone, tinkering with the existing institutions of the Union that is only more derisory because these same institutions are, by treaties, already those related to this currency. Recent weeks have confirmed that this undemocratic and dedicated edifice in the interests of the ruling classes European should be pulled down in order to impose popular sovereignty.

There will be no anti-austerity programme without an orientation of popular mobilization, confrontation and break with these institutions and the rules of the European Union.

The balance of power imposed by peoples will allow the implement of such a policy by completely changing the rules of the euro, or we must prepare to leave the Eurozone. The past few weeks show that an essential part of such a policy in the European Union countries is the establishment of a coordinated, international action, setting common targets. The Greek people have remained tragically alone in recent months.

It is up to European anti-capitalists to rise to meet the challenges so that the next social confrontations build a balance of power making it possible to overcome the obstacles and that the European workers' movement, in its political, trade unionist and social forms, makes the links necessary for a Europe-wide offensive against austerity.

Greece- Polarisation in Syriza as democracy undermined in Greece

Red Flag's Colleen Bolger has recently returned from Athens, where she has been reporting on the political turmoil in Greece. Her previous dispatches, along with other articles and stat

Greek democracy is in grave danger. The IMF envoy to Athens has declared that the government's proposed cuts do not go far enough. Brussels technocrats are taking up residence to oversee the administration of Greek political and economic life.

A condition of the bailout is that no legislation can be passed without first showing it to the lenders' representatives. There is also pressure to rescind legislation passed prior to the conclusion of the bailout agreement. The Greek banking system is being kept on a tight leash.

The vilification of those who voted against the agreement has increased in intensity.

Stooges of the right have initiated legal proceedings against former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis. Kathimerini newspaper published a transcript of a Varoufakis phone call, during which he explained that he investigated a temporary payment system in case Greece were forced out of the eurozone. The right allege that this amounts to treason.

Similarly, the media have sensationalised a Syriza Left Platform meeting that discussed how the government could cope with an exit from the eurozone. They report this as a nefarious "plot" hatched by communist relics of a bygone-era.

The contradiction, as others have pointed out, is that the media and the right wing accuse the left of having no practical alternative to Tsipras's capitulation and also claim that the consideration of any alternative plan is a secret conspiracy. In fact, the Left Platform has made a consistent and open argument about the need to nationalise the banks and other sections of industry.

That Varoufakis has, in a matter of weeks, gone from being an object of awe to being hounded reflects that the right, so discredited after the referendum, is thriving on Tsipras's about-face on the bailout. Varoufakis explained in the phone call that German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble's real aim in negotiations with Greece was to impose discipline on the rest of the continent:

"He believes there has to be some fiscal transfers; some degree of political union. He believes that for that political union to work without federation, without the legitimacy that a properly elected federal parliament can render, can bestow upon an executive, it will have to be done in a very disciplinary way.

"And he said explicitly to me that a Grexit is going to equip him with sufficient bargaining, sufficient terrorising power in order to impose upon the French that which Paris has been resisting. And what is that? A degree of transfer of budget making powers from Paris to Brussels."

The ongoing struggle in Syriza

To a casual observer, Tsipras might appear to have been completely transformed – from fiery orator when addressing hundreds of thousands of people in Syntagma Square during the referendum campaign, to a beaten man who returned from Brussels with a memorandum he said he did not believe in, and finally to a statesman typical of any other.

Tsipras was never the likely hero and saviour. The radical left always knew this. His change in posture is not so surprising, but it is nevertheless considerable. He has presided over the signing of an agreement pledging support to the Israeli military, he met the Egyptian junta leader president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and he employs crass innuendo against the left.

Tsipras scored an important victory against the left at a 30 July Syriza central committee meeting. The left pushed for a party conference of the standing delegates to take place before the agreement is finally ratified at the parliamentary sitting on 18 August. Instead, the conference will take place in September, which, as Left Platform leader Panagiotis Lafazanis said in a statement published on the website Iskra, "makes no sense, as the participants will be asked to ratify a fait accompli".

The left had hoped to consolidate the opposition to the agreement, which earlier was expressed in a statement signed by a majority of the central committee prior to the parliamentary vote on 15 July.

In the meeting, Tsipras reiterated the narrative that there was no alternative to signing the agreement, that it would be worse to have New Democracy or Pasok in office and a setback for the first government of the left to fall so soon. This appeal to prop up the government no matter what has traction among those for whom parliamentary manoeuvring is more critical than struggle – in this case a grouping known as "the 53", which originally was in the party majority.

There is little pressure being brought to bear on the waverers from outside of the party – it will take time for the struggle in the streets and in workplaces to regain its potency. Members of the 53 had signed the original statement of opposition, but declared a moratorium on conflict within the party on the morning of 30 July.

Nonetheless, in the course of the meeting, 17 central committee members resigned. All were supporters of the ex-Maoist KOE group. While the outcome of the meeting was to close off the possibility of the left winning a majority of the party, the fight is not over. The left has not been subdued. Opposition has in fact hardened.

The Left Current (a sub group of the Left Platform) held a rally in a sports stadium in central Athens on 27 July. Lafazanis addressed up to 2,000 supporters. During his speech, which was punctuated by chants of "Oxi!" (Greek for "no"), from the crowd, he argued that the alternative to the agreement was in the party program. Speaking of the overwhelming numbers of young people that had voted "no" in the referendum, he recalled the youth wing of the communist-led resistance, EPON, and called on the youth to be the new generation for the "no".

Others who spoke included Antonis Davanellos of Syriza's Red Network; Manolis Glezos, recently retired member of the European Parliament for Syriza, and famous for removing the swastika from the Acropolis during the WWII Nazi occupation; and Petros Papakonstantinou of Antarsya, the anti-capitalist coalition. The Red Network has also held meetings in regions outside Athens and a Left Platform event will be held in Thessaloniki soon.

The right wing has also hardened its stance. Government spokesperson Olga Gerovasili told reporters after the central committee meeting: "At the moment there are two different strategies competing in the same party: one that wants Greece inside the euro and the other that wants Greece outside the Euro. These two can't exist together at the government level". After the vote, deputy prime minister and member of the party's right Yannis Dragasakis said: "I hope that we are heading for the refoundation of a new party".

The 18 August vote will take place after negotiations with the lenders and just two days prior to the next loan payment. It will be another showdown between the left and the majority. Tsipras might call an election, which would raise the question of who the candidates will be. He has the power to determine the list. There will also be the conference in September, and the election of delegates at a district level.

It is the height of the summer holidays now as people return to their families for the Assumption festival on 15 August. But flash points are not far off.

The political struggle matters

Rebuilding the struggle in the streets and workplaces is vital. A meeting of 250 activists and unionists from both the Left Platform and Antarsya was held in Athens on 28 July to establish "No until the end committees". The report from the meeting states: "It is obvious to everyone that a massive resurgence of the labour-popular movement is an immediate necessity to shift political and economic developments ... in order to finally reverse the memorandum".

The creation of these committees is a concrete step toward rebuilding the broader struggle. It is made possible by the cooperation between activists and revolutionaries both within and outside of Syriza. Six hundred and fifty unionists and activists have signed on to the initial call for the creation of these committees. At the meeting, activists also called a demonstration to coincide with the 18 August parliamentary vote and a demonstration at the annual trade fair in Thessaloniki in September.

But the struggle has ebbed from its heights in 2011 and 2012. Among the mass of the population there is fear that there is no alternative to the government's agreement with the creditors – and if there is an alternative, uncertainty about what it is.

In these circumstances, the political struggle within Syriza matters. The debates between the left and right of the party are decisive to rebuilding the movement.

For the last three years, the party has surged forward and greatly increased its influence within the working class. To the extent that people can bring themselves to stay engaged in politics after the capitulation, they are attuned to whether the whole party is going to go along with it.

In so politicised a society as Greece, people remember the positions of different groups – even when they do not agree with them at first. Coming from Australia, I am used to answering questions about communism in terms of whether a revolution is possible or what it may look like etc. Here, there are many groups from the broad communist tradition. They are judged by the answers they give to the questions of today.

For example, I came across two Algerian migrants discussing the Communist Party's position of opposing austerity but maintaining membership of the eurozone. Impossible, the two agree. Like most people I have spoken to outside of the organised left, they know the positions of the various groups and their key spokespeople.

When I joined the discussion, they said that now is not like it was back in 2010 or 2011 or those times in Palestine when you had people out on the street every day. The politicisation lacks the intensity it previously had. There is five years' accumulated learning in mass consciousness but the lessons of the left government are yet to be understood on a mass level.

The debate within Syriza and its outcome are important for distilling these lessons and setting up the next phase of the struggle on clearer political foundations. In turn, rebuilding the struggle can give confidence to left activists in the opposition of Syriza to continue to fight. These poles are not counterposed. To force a counterposition – "all Syriza and forget the struggle", or "all struggle and forget Syriza" – is a mistake.

August 10

[Red Flag](#)

Greece- Fourteen organizations of the Greek Left call for mobilizations

The developments in Athens are dramatic and their pace is accelerating. In the next few hours the Greek parliament will vote the new, third, Memorandum agreed between the Syriza government and the Europeans following the now standard express procedure of a single-day (and night...) "debate". The MPs of Syriza's Left Platform have already announced that they will vote no and the number of other Syriza MPs who will do the same is still unknown. Among them there will certainly be Zoe Kostantopoulou, the president of the Greek parliament who is currently waging a desperate fight for the ultra-minimal procedures of the parliamentary debate to be respected. Her attitude has triggered a tremendous media attack which is now openly backed by members of the government and pro-government Syriza MPs. Another major development was the call issued today for the popular mobilization and the constitution of committees against the Memorandum across the country by the leaders of Syriza's Left Platform (Panagiotis Lafazanis of the Left Current, and Antonis Davanelos of DEA/Red Network) and leading figures of twelve other organizations of the Greek radical Left. Among them two (ARAN and ARAS) are founding components of Antarsya. This is widely considered as the first public step towards the constitution of a new political front that will regroup a large range of forces of the radical Left opposing the new Memorandum and the neoliberal U-turn of the Syriza government.

The Memorandum will certainly be voted by a broad majority in Parliament, thanks to the support of the centre-right and rightwing parties. However it is highly likely that the government will lose support among its own parliamentary group and will call for snap elections in a month's time. The main rationale for this

unprecedented move is to prevent the emerging leftwing opposition to its policy to organize and also to be able to hold elections before the concrete impact of the new austerity measures starts biting. In any case, these elections will be the first test for the new anti-austerity front that is crystallizing around the Left Platform. The next few days will be crucial.

Aghios Nikolas Fokidas, August 13, 2015

No to the new memorandum Call for struggle and mobilization across the country

The undersigned, representing a wide range of forces and organizations of the Left reject the new third memorandum submitted today to the Parliament and call for large unitary struggles to overturn all memoranda and impose a new progressive orientation for the country.

The signing of a new Memorandum by a government that was elected to abolish the previous two, amounts to a major disaster for the Greek people and democracy. The new Memorandum means even more austerity, further restriction of the rights of the citizenry and the perpetuation of the country's regime of tutelage. The new Memorandum is a complete reversal of the mandate of the Greek people who rejected in the referendum of 5 July in their entirety the neoliberal policies of austerity and of neocolonial dependency.

Throughout the last five years the people opposed in every possible way the fear and blackmailing and struggled for an independent, just, reconstructed, democratic and sovereign Greece. As was the case for the previous ones, this Memorandum needs to be met with the wider militant resistance of a cohesive and determined society. We will continue down the path of July 5 until the end, until the overthrow of the policies of the Memoranda, with an alternative plan for the next day, for democracy and social justice in Greece.

The fight against the new Memorandum begins now, with the mobilization of the people in every corner of the country. For this fight to develop and win, it is necessary to build up popular organization at all levels and in all social areas.

We call for the constitution of a broad political and social nationwide movement and for the creation to of committees of struggle against the new memorandum, against austerity and against the tutelage of the country. This will be a unitary movement that will justify the aspirations of the people for democracy and social justice.

The fight that led to the triumph of "No" of July 5 continues and will win!

Thursday, August 13, 2015

- › Panagiotis Lafazanis (Left Platform - Left Current)
- › Alekos Vernardakis (Communist Renewal)
- › Nikos Galanis (Leftwing Intervention)
- › Dimitris Kavouras (Communist Organization Reconstruction) [[1](#)]
- › Kaltsonis Dimitris (Association Yannis Kordatos) [[2](#)]
- › Panagiotis Mantas (DIKKI – Socialist Left) [[3](#)]
- › Anthonis Davanelos (Left Platform –DEA)
- › Andreas Pagiatsos (Xekinima) [[4](#)]
- › Spyros Sakellaropoulos (ARAN – Left Recomposition)
- › Dimitris Sarafianos (ARAS – Leftwing Anticapitalist Regroupment)
- › Maria Souani (Workers Struggle) [[5](#)]
- › Themis Tzimas (Former member of PASOK National Council)
- › Lambros Heetas (Initiative of the 1000)

Footnotes

[[1](#)] The Communist Organization Reconstruction and the Association Yannis Kordatos are regroupments of former KKE (Greek CP) activists

[[2](#)] The Communist Organization Reconstruction and the Association Yannis Kordatos are regroupments of former KKE (Greek CP) activists

[[3](#)] DIKKI –Socialist Left is a regroupment of former PASOK activists that was part of the Syriza coalition

[[4](#)] Xekinima is the Greek section of the CWI

[[5](#)] Workers Struggle is a network of activists who are still in their majority members of the KKE

Greece- “Popular Unity” is born

Early this morning, 25 Syriza MPs left the parliamentary group of the party to create a new group under the name of “Popular Unity”. Most of these MPs are affiliated to the Left Platform, but some others also joined like Vangelis Diamantopoulos or Rachel Makri, a close collaborator of Zoe Kostantopoulou. [[1](#)]

This is a major development in Greek politics but also for the radical Left, in Greece and at an international level.

Three elements need to be emphasized.

The first is that "Popular Unity" is the name of the new political front, which will regroup thirteen organizations of the radical Left, those who signed the [text issued on August 13](#) calling for the constitution of the Front of the No.

This front is therefore the first tangible result of a recomposition within the Greek radical Left. A recomposition that draws the lessons of the last five years and of course of the experience of Syriza in office and of the resulting catastrophe. But the goal of the front is even broader than this, it is to provide an expression to social forces that do not necessarily recognize themselves as part of the Left but want to fight austerity, the Memoranda and the "Troika rule reloaded" of the new Memorandum.

The second is that the goal of the front is to constitute the political expression of the No as was expressed both in the January elections and in the referendum of July 5. The main programmatic lines are the rupture with austerity and the memoranda, the rejection of all privatizations and the nationalization under social control of strategic sectors of the economy, starting with the banking system, the cancellation of the major part of the Greek debt (starting with the immediate interruption of its repayment) and, more broadly a set of radical measures that will shift the balance of forces in favour of labour and of the popular classes and open up a path for the progressive reconstruction of the country, of its economy and of its institutions.

These goals cannot be realized without exiting the Eurozone as the recent disaster has abundantly demonstrated and without breaking with the whole set of policies institutionalized by the EU. [2]. The front will also struggle for a unitary internationalist struggle around common objectives at the European and international level and will support exiting NATO, breaking the existing agreements between Greece and Israel and radically opposing imperialist wars and interventions. This transitional programme is situated in the perspective of a socialism of the 21st century.

The third is that this new parliamentary group is now the third in terms of its size in the Greek Parliament, ahead of Golden Dawn, the neonazi party. This means that in the next few days its leader, Panagiotis Lafazanis, will get a mandate to constitute a government that will last for three days, as the Greek constitution stipulates.

After the resignation of the Tsipras government this mandate is now in the hands of the second party in Parliament, New Democracy, the main rightwing opposition party. This span of time will be used by Popular Unity to trigger a broad debate and the mobilization of all the social forces who wish to fight austerity and the Memoranda, the previous as well as the new one.

The programme of the party and the full range of its support among leading personalities of the Greek Left, which is expected to be quite impressive, will be released at the start of next week.

Athens, August 21 2015

[1] The 25 members of parliament are: Panagiotis Lafazanis, Stathis Leoutsakos, Kostas Isichos, Rachel Makri, Kostas Lapavitsas, Dimitris Stratoulis, Evgenia Ouzounidou, Thanasis Petrakos, Stefanos Samoilis, Athanasios Skoumas, Yannis Stathas, Alexandra Tsanaka, Despina Charalambidou, Eleni Psarea, Thomas Kotsias, Aglaia Kyritsi, Vasilis Kyriakakis, Michalis Kritsotakis, Ioanna Gaitani, Litsa Amanatidou, Yannis Zerdelis, Kostas Delimitros, Ilias Ioannidis, Zisis Zannas and Vangelis Diamantopoulos. There is speculation in the Greek press that a further four will join them.

[2] During the press conference organized on 21 August, Panagiotis Lafazanis, former Energy Minister in the Tsipras government, explained that if it were necessary to leave the Eurozone to cancel the memorandum they would do so, adding that such an exit would be "prepared".

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Europe- Capitalism vs. Democracy in Europe

Let us begin with a quote from an essay on bourgeois democracy in Russia, written in 1906, after the defeat of the first Russian revolution:

"It is highly ridiculous to believe that there is an elective affinity between grand capitalism today, as it is presently imported into Russia, and well established in the United States (...) and 'democracy' or 'liberty' (in all the possible meanings of the word); the real question should be : how are these things even 'possible,' on long term, under capitalist domination ?" [1] Who is the author of this insightful comment? Lenin, Trotsky, or perhaps the early Russian Marxist Plekhanov? In fact, it is from Max Weber, the well known bourgeois sociologist. Although Weber never developed this insight, he is suggesting here that there is an intrinsic contradiction between capitalism and democracy.

The history of the 20th century seems to confirm this opinion: very often, when the power of the ruling classes seemed to be threatened by the people, democracy was pushed aside as a luxury that one couldn't afford, and replaced by fascism—Europe in the 1920s and '30s—or military dictatorship: Latin America in the 1960s and '70s. Fortunately enough, this is not the case of Europe today, but we have, particularly during the last decades with the triumph of neoliberalism, a democracy of low intensity, a democracy without social content, which has become an empty shell. Sure enough, we still have elections, but there seems to be only one party, the U.M.P., United Market Party, with two variants which have only limited differences: the right-wing neoliberal version, and the left-center social-liberal one.

Mario Draghi, head of the European Central Bank, and Mario Monti, former European Commissioner—both former employees of Goldman Sachs. The decline of democracy is particularly visible in the oligarchic functioning of the European Union, where the European Parliament has very little influence, while power is firmly in the hands of non-elected bodies, such as the European Commission, or the Central European Bank. According to Giandomenico Majone, Professor at the European Institute of Florence, and one of the semi-official theoreticians of the Union, Europe needs "non-majoritarian institutions," i.e. "public institutions that are, on purpose, not responsible neither towards electors nor elected officials," the only way to protect us against "the tyranny of the majority." In such institutions "qualities such as expertise, professional discretion and coherence (...) are much more important than the direct democratic responsibility." [2] One could hardly imagine a more blatant apology for the oligarchic and antidemocratic nature of the Union.

With the present economic crisis, democracy has descended to its lowest levels. In a recent editorial, the French Journal *Le Figaro* wrote that the present situation is an exceptional one, and this explains why democratic procedures cannot be always respected; when normal times return, we can re-establish democratic legitimacy. We have therefore a sort of economic/political "state of exception" in the sense of Carl Schmitt. But who is the sovereign that has the right to proclaim, according to Schmitt, the state of exception?

The Sovereignty of Finance Capital

For some time after 1789 and before the proclamation of the French Republic in 1792, the King had the constitutional right of Veto. Whatever the resolutions of the National Assembly, whatever the desires and aspirations of the French people, the last word belonged to His Majesty. In Europe today, the King is not a Bourbon or Habsburg, the King is Financial Capital. All the present European governments—except the Greek one!—are functionaries of this absolutist, intolerant, and anti-democratic Monarch. Whether right-wing, "extreme-center," or pseudo-leftist; whether conservative, demo-Christian, or social-democratic, they fanatically serve her Majesty's right of Veto.

The absolute and total sovereign today in Europe is, therefore, the global financial market. Financial markets dictate to each country the wages and pensions, cuts in social expenses, privatizations, the rate of unemployment. Some time ago, they directly nominate the heads of government (Papademos in Greece and Mario Monti in Italy), picking so-called "experts" who are faithful servants of the financial markets.

Let us have a closer look at some of these all-powerful "experts." Where do they come from? Mario Draghi, head of the Central European Bank, is a former manager of Goldman Sachs; Mario Monti, former European Commissioner, is also a former adviser to Goldman Sachs. Monti and Papademos are members of the Trilateral Commission, a very select club of politicians and bankers that discuss what to do next. The President of the European Trilateral is Peter Sutherland, former European Commissioner, and former manager at Goldman Sachs; the vice-president of the Trilateral, Vladimir Dlouhy, former Czech Minister of Economy, is now adviser to Goldman Sachs for Eastern Europe.

In other words, the "experts" in charge of saving Europe from the crisis used to work for one of the banks directly responsible for the sub-prime crisis in the United States. This doesn't mean that there is a conspiracy to deliver Europe to Goldman Sachs; it only illustrates the oligarchic nature of the "experts" elite ruling the Union.

The governments of Europe are indifferent to public protest, strikes, and mass demonstrations, and don't care about the opinion or the feelings of the population; they are attentive—extremely attentive—only to the opinion and the feelings of the financial markets, and their employees, the ratings agencies. In the European pseudo-democracy, to consult the people by a referendum is a dangerous heresy—worse, a crime against the Holy Market. The Greek referendum was not only about fundamental economic and social issues, it was also and above all about democracy.

The 61.3 per cent Greek NO was an attempt to challenge the Royal Veto of finance. This could have been a first step towards the transformation of Europe, from capitalist Monarchy into a democratic Republic. But the present European oligarchic institutions have little tolerance for democracy. They immediately punished the Greek people for their insolent attempt to refuse the austericide. Catastroika is back in Greece with a vengeance, imposing a brutal program of economically recessive, socially unjust, and humanly unsustainable measures. The German right-wing fabricated this monster, and forced it on the Greek people with the complicity of Greece false "friends" (Hollande, Renzi, etc).

Finding Scapegoats

While the crisis gets worse and public outrage grows, there is an increasing temptation, for many governments, to distract public attention towards a scapegoat: the immigrants. Thus undocumented foreigners, non-communitarian immigrants, Muslims, and Roma (Gypsies) are being presented as the main threat to the country. This of course opens great opportunities for racist, xenophobic, semi-fascist, or outright fascist parties, which are growing and are already, in several countries, part of the government—a very serious threat to democracy in Europe.

The only hope is the growing aspiration for another Europe, beyond savage competition, brutal austerity policies, and eternal debts to be paid. Another Europe is possible, a democratic, ecological, and social one. But it will not be achieved without a common struggle of the European populations, beyond ethnic borders and the narrow limits of the nation-State.

In other words, our hope for the future is popular indignation, and the social movements, which have been on the rise, particularly among youth and women, in several countries. For the social movements, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the struggle for democracy is a struggle against neoliberalism, and, in the last analysis, against capitalism itself, an inherently antidemocratic system, as Max Weber already pointed out a hundred years ago.

August 11, 2015

Ireland- Victory for marriage equality - the birth of a new political imagination?

The Irish electorate's recent resounding "yes" to the question of marriage equality for LGBT people (62% of the electorate, approximately 1.2 million, voted in favour the proposal) briefly turned the international spotlight on Ireland for reasons other than its imploding economic and banking system. Ireland is the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage by popular vote. This is a significant achievement in and of itself, made all the more remarkable by the fact that it occurred in a country that did not decriminalise (male) homosexual activity until 1993 (after it was compelled to by the European Court of Human Rights), and which only legalised divorce in 1995 by the narrowest of margins. The Irish and international media were quick to proclaim the referendum result a victory for the forces of social liberalisation that put Ireland at the "vanguard of social change" and a defeat for the Catholic Church and its once dominant hegemonic position in Irish society.

It is certainly true that the referendum result was a significant challenge to the historic alliance between church and state, so central to the foundation of the Irish state. The referendum involved an addition to one of the most conservative articles of the Irish Constitution: [Article 41](#) on marriage and the family.

The [Irish Constitution](#) was, and is, a deeply conservative document; a product of a collaboration between the Catholic Church and the State, authored by Ireland's founding patriarchs Eamon de Valera and Archbishop John Charles McQuaid. Marriage enjoys a privileged position in this constitution where a family, exclusively based on heterosexual marriage, is envisaged as such: "[t]he State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded and to protect it against attack."

The family as imagined in these articles is highly gendered with the "special" role of women within the private home also elevated as an ideal: "[t]he State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved." We now know that this vision of the stable "happy" traditional family so beloved by Catholic Ireland rested upon on a brutal religious and state system of containment where women and babies were considered ["little more than a commodity for trade amongst religious orders,"](#) with the knowledge and complicity of the State.

The collapse of Catholic hegemony is long in the making; its origins can be located in the revelations of sexual abuse, the Magdalene and religious institutions, and the mother and baby homes. The blame for this painful, [abusive](#) aspect of Irish history cannot be solely located at the gates of the Catholic Church; rather it is intimately woven into the structure of the Irish State, making the recent referendum victory all the more potent. However, the referendum result is notable as something more than an indication of Ireland's social liberalisation and shift away from Catholicism.

Since the economic crisis of 2008, Irish society has experienced a dramatic restructuring of economic life with unprecedented levels of austerity imposed in order to rescue Ireland's banking system and, by extension, the wider project associated with the European Union. The Troika bailout agreement, enthusiastically endorsed by the Irish political establishment, imposed eye-watering levels of austerity that insulated the richest members of society and explicitly targeted the poorest and most vulnerable.

However, in the past year a [significant mass protest movement](#) has emerged, galvanized by the imposition of a deeply unpopular water tax, to fight austerity, producing a political crisis for the Irish establishment. This political crisis is not unique to Ireland; it is evident across Europe where what Tariq Ali describes as the ["extreme centre"](#) is facing a moment of crisis as it finds itself increasingly incapable of responding to the needs and desires of the people of Europe.

In his Prison Notebooks, Antonio Gramsci reminds us that “the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” The victory for same-sex marriage in Ireland should be understood as part of this interregnum. The old is dying in Ireland but what will replace it remains up for grabs.

Certainly, the political establishment is keen to impose not simply the economic but also the ideological logic of neoliberalism. As a political objective, same-sex marriage sits comfortable with prevailing neoliberal ideology. The model gay and lesbian couple projected by Yes campaigners bears a striking resemblance to the ideal neoliberal citizen.

In the weeks coming up to referendum every second person you encountered seemed to be wearing a badge that said “Yes Equality.” Posters produced by the Labour Party were emblazoned on every second lamppost with the slogan: “[Vote Yes! Let’s treat everyone equally.](#)”

In a country that spectacularly fails to treat large sections of the population in a manner that resembles even the most conservative conception of equality, this would be laughable if the reality was not so horrific: asylum seekers fleeing torture, poverty, and persecution are left to languish in the notorious [direct provision system](#) for years; women are denied access to even [basic bodily autonomy](#) when pregnant; and the entire political and economic establishment has recently gone into overdrive to ensure an insurmountable level of economic inequality.

Yet, the idea of “Yes Equality” captured the political imagination of the current moment in Ireland and those who have disproportionality suffered as a result of austerity — young people and people living in working class communities — were the strongest and most enthusiastic supporters of the referendum.

This suggests that there is a real opportunity to build an alternative to neoliberal logic and to construct a more inclusive and emancipatory notion of equality.

Ireland- Victory for marriage equality - how Irish was it? And how much a victory?

I very much liked [Sinéad Kennedy’s](#) piece on the yes to same-sex marriage in the Irish referendum. I share her sense that the 62% yes vote on May 22 was an impressive progressive victory. At the same time, I strongly agree with her statement, “As a political objective, same-sex marriage sits comfortable with prevailing neoliberal ideology.” I would like to add a few comments about how the Irish yes was both an episode in a fast-moving international saga and a very Irish event in a very Irish story. I think this can help us understand how the outcome was both progressive and not-so-progressive at the same time.

Wherever in today’s world same-sex marriage is won, it is a victory for equality — and at the same time a contribution to growing inequality. It is a victory for equality because it allows millions of same-sex partners to enjoy basic rights that cross-sex spouses take for granted, like not being thrown out of your home when your partner dies. It is a contribution to growing inequality because it allows the state to pursue the neoliberal agenda of transferring its social responsibilities for people in need to their families. In return for the rights they are granted, same-sex couples pledge to form stable, difficult-to-dissolve households that bear the burden of supporting their members when they are unemployed, disabled, or sick. And in fact, initial studies have shown that same-sex marriage helps increase inequality in LGBTIQ communities. Well-off lesbians and gay men gain from it, notably from lower inheritance taxes. Low-income LGBTIQ often lose out on average, in any event in countries (Germany and Britain, for example) where poor people’s social benefits are slashed when they have an earning spouse.

This helps explain the paradox that Ireland has now defied the Catholic Church by granting marriage equality while its draconian anti-abortion laws remain stubbornly entrenched. As [Katha Pollitt](#) has pointed out with reference to the US, “Marriage equality has cross-class appeal [whereas it is] low-income women who suffer the most from abortion restrictions — and since when have their issues been at the top of the middle and upper classes’ to-do list?” Furthermore, “Marriage equality costs society nothing [but] reproductive rights come with a price tag.”

There’s another paradox about the Irish victory: it reflects Irish people’s desire to be more European after years of crisis in which the European Union’s main impact on Ireland has been the imposition of (in Kennedy’s words) “eye-watering austerity.” Adopting same-sex marriage makes Ireland more like Scandinavia, the Benelux countries, and France (as well as England, Wales, and Scotland). It’s a way to feel positive again about being part of Europe and about being linked to global trends, despite the collapse of so many illusions about the benefits of taking part in globalization as a Celtic Tiger. For Ireland’s pro-EU ruling class, it’s been a helpful way to conjure up once more the much-dented pride that the Irish felt when they joined the Euro zone in 2002 (while the UK stayed aloof).

Clearly the elite’s support for marriage equality elicited strong support from Irish society, from almost every region of the country and almost every layer of the population. There has been an across-the-board, breathtakingly rapid shift in Irish people’s sense of their national identity, comparable to what happened in Argentina with the victory for same-sex marriage there in 2010. The Argentinean victory, too, was a moment when an overwhelmingly Catholic country collectively thumbed its nose at the Church (personified

by then-Cardinal Bergoglio, today Pope Francis). Today in Argentina, gay rights is a virtual civic religion. The same seems likely to happen in Ireland too, once the divisions of the referendum campaign are left behind. This is a striking contrast with the 2013 victory for marriage equality in supposedly secular France, which split the country down the middle and produced a wave of homophobia that has lastingly traumatized French LGBTIQ people.

Ireland's Catholic identity is more deeply rooted than Argentina's, as a reaction to centuries of oppression by Protestant England. But despite the role Kennedy mentions of Ireland's Catholic "founding patriarchs" in writing the Republic's Constitution, there has always been a strain of anti-clericalism in Irish nationalism. James Joyce highlighted it in his Portrait of the Artist when the protagonist's father rails against the Church for its role in bringing down 19th-century Irish leader Charles Parnell, "my dead king!" There hasn't been much love lost between the hierarchy and Sinn Fein over the decades either, and Sinn Fein's growing support for LGBT rights North and South over the past twenty years hasn't helped. With the "collapse of Catholic hegemony" that Kennedy describes, this Irish anti-clericalism now seems finally to be taking the ascendancy. Irony of ironies, Northern Ireland now only has the Protestant Unionists, obsessed for years with preventing Papist domination, to thank for the fact that it is the only remaining major part of the British Isles to take the Pope's position on marriage.

As Kennedy says, "The old is dying in Ireland but what will replace it remains up for grabs." Marriage equality could turn out to be part of neoliberalism's steady onward march. Or it could be a breakthrough for an anti-neoliberal feminist movement with a full reproductive justice agenda. Sinn Fein's relatively strong showing (with ups and downs) in recent polls ahead of the elections due in early 2016 is one promising sign. Another is the emergence of the Platform for Renewal, a loose alliance of unions, Sinn Fein, and the far left in the fight against new government water charges. A third has been the marginalized but persistent [critical commentary](#) voiced by Irish radical queers who are "sick ... of 'marriage equality' being treated as the sine qua non of progress for queer people." If this diverse and fragmented resistance manages to come together, it could be the beginning of something grand.

Britain- Corbyn for Labour leader – a remarkable campaign

After the shock result of the British General election on May 7 in which the Conservatives won an outright majority, defeated Labour leader Ed Milliband announced his resignation within hours of the polls closing. Deputy leader Harriet Harman took over as acting leader and the process was set in train whereby a new leader of the Labour Party will be announced on September 12.

There will be four candidates on the ballot paper. Liz Kendall, currently bottom in opinion polls, is the most consistently right wing – an open admirer of former Prime Minister Tony Blair. Andy Burnham, former Shadow Health Minister and Yvette Cooper former Shadow Home Secretary are the candidates of the status quo.

Front runner Jeremy Corbyn is the candidate of the left. An active part of the anti-austerity movement, heavily involved in the anti-war movement, and a consistent supporter of the Palestinian people, Corbyn is rumoured to have broken the whip (refused to vote as instructed by the parliamentary group bosses) more than anyone else in Parliament.

Below we print a statement from Socialist Resistance on the remarkable campaign sparked by Corbyn's decision to stand.

The Corbyn campaign is a remarkable phenomenon. He actually stands a very good chance of winning the Labour leadership unless the Labour establishment can turn around the tide over the next six weeks.

As things stand, however, the tide remains with him. The Labour leadership are like rabbits in the headlights. Large numbers of people, young people in particular, are joining his campaign and people are flocking to his rallies and campaign events. Many are signing up to Labour as registered supporters or as affiliated supporters through their unions. [1] The support from major trade unions for Corbyn's candidacy has been extraordinary.

Labour has always been different from many of its fellow social democratic parties in having the direct affiliation of trade unions. Fourteen unions are affiliated and historically they have tended to act as a force against the left and to support the leadership establishment of the party. But the two largest trade unions affiliated to the party – Unite and Unison – have now both endorsed Corbyn.

The decision of the biggest union Unite (organising in the private sector), led by Len McCluskey, was not a particular surprise as it had been following a more left wing line in recent years, but the nomination of Corbyn by Unison is a major change in the situation. Unison is a major public sector union that has talked a lot against austerity and cuts to benefits and services, but has rarely organised action. At one time in the recent past Unison had the largest affiliated membership of the Labour Party and over one third of its million plus members are on its 'Labour Link' mailing list. A consultation exercise over the leadership election of Unison's 12 regions showed that nine of them wanted Corbyn nominating.

The Communication Workers Union is also a major national union with over 200,000 members. It not only nominated Corbyn, but General Secretary, Dave Ward, took to YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?>

[v=W_b...](#)) to motivate its members to register to vote for Corbyn on the grounds of his policies and to signal a move to the left and against austerity in the party.

Corbyn also has the nominations of several smaller unions, such as the Bakers Union, transport union the TSSA and train drivers union ASLEF, while the other large affiliate, the general union GMB, has declined to nominate any of the four candidates – a blow for the right.

As we near the closing date for supporting nominations, Corbyn also has a massive lead in nominations over his rivals from local party branches (Constituency Labour Parties – CLPs) with over 130 nominations (from 600+) compared to around 100 for other challengers.

Corbyn's campaign has made major inroads into three areas – traditional party members organised in constituencies (local bodies based on geographical voting areas), affiliated trade unionists and new, overwhelmingly young, members and supporters of the party. This is a profoundly radicalising development, whichever way the vote goes.

If Corbyn wins and sets off in an anti-austerity direction, major new possibilities will open up including a probable split by the Blairites. If he loses he will have encouraged and radicalised a lot of young people and trade union activists, strengthened the left in the Labour Party, and exerted leftward pressure on whoever does win.

Tony Benn failed to win the deputy leadership of the Labour Party in 1981 (albeit by a tiny margin) after a massive campaign with a big and vibrant Labour Left and a large and militant trade union movement in a period of industrial militancy. Now Corbyn is on the cusp of winning the Labour leadership with a (more or less) non-existent organised Labour left, a very weak trade union movement and historically low strike levels.

Some of the factors involved are clear. Labour lost an election that it clearly could and should have won—and the reason it lost was because it tail ended the Tory cuts agenda. This was followed by Harriet Harman's appalling decision not to oppose Osborne's budget (which ended up with her position outflanked to the left by the Lib Dems and unionist parties). All the other contenders for the Labour Leadership not only supported her in that but further collapsed into the Tory agenda by toeing the line that Labour had lost the election because the campaign had been too far to the left and that the progressive policies that it did adopt should now be dropped.

Conviction politics is playing a role in this. People inside the Labour Party and outside find it a breath of fresh air to find someone in the Labour leadership contest who says what they mean and means what they says in a non-egotistic way.

It is also clear that Scottish politics are also a part of this development, not just the radicalising influence of the independence referendum, and the rise of the SNP, but also the role of the SNP MPs in Parliament since the election. They have been in effect the real opposition for the Tories as shown in the vote against benefit cuts where the SNP's 55 votes outnumbered the votes of 47 Labour MPs, led by Corbyn, who defied the leadership.

The recent 'maiden' (first) speech in parliament by new SNP MP Mhairi Black, at 20 years of age the youngest MP for centuries, challenged Labour to oppose the Tory benefit cuts and declared Tony Benn one of her heroes. The YouTube video of that speech became one of the most watched parliamentary speeches in Britain ever, as it clocked up millions of hits online, many from young people.

A few months ago it seemed unlikely that Corbyn would even get on the ballot paper. He only secured the necessary 35 nominations of MPs with two minutes to spare and after a number of right wing MPs agreed to nominate him, ostensibly to give the opportunity for Andy Burnham to appear as a middle-of-the-road candidate rather than the most leftwing person in the race.

Of Corbyn's nominators only 18 followed him in voting against the benefit cuts. The gulf between the parliamentary party and the base of the membership in the trade unions and the party at large is massive. A Corbyn leadership would struggle to fill the Shadow Cabinet meeting room with his handful of MP supporters and there is a danger that he would become a hostage to the parliamentary party if he did not organise more extensively his supporters in the party at large.

While the left in the Labour Party have created a strong united challenge, the right wing is in disarray, with allegations against each other descending into puerile abuse such as calling each other 'morons' in public. Right wing MPs are openly talking about a 'coup', overturning a Corbyn leadership by the parliamentary party alone, or even a split modelled on the creation of the short-lived Social Democratic Party (SDP) of the 1980s (not a glorious example to emulate).

This is not to say that everything Jeremy Corbyn is saying is right. He seems to have nothing to say on the environment or on electoral reform—which are massive issues since the last election.

A Corbyn victory, however, or indeed a close second, would be a victory for the whole of the left. It would open up the political situation in Britain and radicalise a lot of people—particularly young people. Whether it split the Labour Party or not it would create completely new conditions for anti-austerity politics in England.

Left Unity has rightly welcomed Corbyn's campaign from the beginning understanding its significance and its progressive dynamic.

The conditions for the creation of a new left wing alternative in Britain exist now more than ever. A key task of the coming period will be to unite all those forces that believe in challenging austerity, climate change and resisting the Tory government and its implementation of the neo-liberal consensus. A change in the Labour Party leadership would have a massive effect, but in order to become really significant and sustainable it also needs to reach out and link up with the millions of people who voted Green or SNP or Plaid Cymru (or the smaller socialist groups) in the general election, those who support Left Unity and especially the millions of young people resisting austerity.

Footnotes

[1] According to Labour List in late June the figures were registered supporters: 9,115, affiliated supporters: 3,788 while the number of full members has also grown significantly since the general election.

Scotland- Together we can change Scotland

As we report [here](#) the Scottish Socialist Party is supporting the launch of the Scottish Left Project's electoral challenge on August 29. The Scottish Left Project was set up by forces involved in the Radical Independence campaign (RIC) after the Unionist Project Fear delivered a victory for the no side in the Scottish independence referendum in September 2014. The idea was to build on the energy that exemplified by the Yes campaign and especially by RIC. Its [launch statement](#) makes reference to the rise of Podemos as being another inspiration behind it. Below we publish the statement which has been the basis of the policy discussions throughout Scotland in the run up to the event.

On August 29th 2015 we will launch the Left Project's [highly anticipated electoral challenge for 2016](#). Before that event we are developing a people's policy platform which will tour the country, showing how the Left offers Scottish politics far more than a protest vote.

The policies we are working on can fundamentally transform the lives of millions of people by challenging the corporations, the rich and the powerful.

Our approach builds on the ideas popularised by radical social movements: participatory democracy, democratic public ownership, redistributing wealth and power, and full independence from the UK state and its monarchy. These capture the shared values that brought our project together: collectivism, equality, tolerance, education, grassroots democracy, and internationalism.

Our process for developing this work will be people led – rooted in dialogue and action. We want to hear what people want from a new politics. We want to have the widest possible discussion about how we can work together to ensure parliament represents the millions not the millionaires.

Scotland has already developed a new citizens' politics on the ground. Our challenge now is simply to use that energy to transform Holyrood. In coming months we hope to initiate this as part of the second stage of the independence movement. Hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland want radical change and their voices must be heard.

We will:

- Organise policy primaries all over Scotland. These events will be participative and open. They will be citizens' assemblies which discuss and refine a common programme for radical change. Some of these will be big, some will be small – all will be important.
- Set up consultation meetings with unions, anti-cuts groups, social movements and community organisers to inform our policy platform.
- Be ready to respond if you contact us with your views as an individual which we will add to the debate.

To ensure this nationwide discussion is rooted in radical left-wing politics, the [forces involved](#) in the Left Project have agreed to focus these events on the following seven themes which reflect our values. However, the discussions will be open and not limited to these topics.

Our lives matter

- Housing
- Health
- Community

The system we live under prioritises profit over people, and our living standards are under attack like never before. We think Scotland has the wealth to make sure every citizen has equal access to the resources of a comfortable life. Our problem is faulty distribution, not scarcity. Recognising this, and offering the best possible living standards and life chances to all, will mean a powerful challenge to the real vested interests in

Scotland. We are prepared to open that challenge, because the reward will be a brighter, healthier, happier, and more truly prosperous society.

Our industry in our hands

- Public ownership

Public ownership is central to our agenda for fundamental social change. Our daily work makes society possible, but we have no ownership, influence, or control over industry. This offers no basis for a genuine democratic society. On the grounds of democracy, morality, and efficiency, private profit should have no role in public services.

Our Scotland free from poverty

- Economic justice
- Security
- Trade unionism
- Redistribution through taxing the rich
- Anti-austerity

We live in a country of vast wealth and pervasive poverty. We can only change this by making citizens less dependent on markets for survival. People will not feel empowered in any area of life until they have guaranteed economic security and fair access to society's wealth. We fundamentally oppose the neoliberal idea, common to all leading Scottish parties, that you can have more markets and more social justice. Time and again, more markets means more poverty. The resulting social policy is simple: stop making people and their life necessities into commodities, or risk new generations of rising injustice and isolation.

Our place in the world

- Internationalism
- Peace and nuclear disarmament
- Anti-imperialist foreign policy

International solidarity with the oppressed is a core value for our movement. We want no part in NATO and we will build a new foreign policy framework that ends relations with arms companies and shifts military production to peaceful ends. Scotland should join an international alliance of parties, campaigns, and governments that back a new agenda of peace and cooperation. If we become the 21st century's newest state, we must avoid the 20th century pattern of spending more on wasteful military competition than on green investment.

Our Equal Scotland

- Feminism
- Anti-Racism
- LGBTI Liberation

The Left's agenda must have feminism, anti-racism and LGBTI liberation at the core of everything we do. That means they must feed into to our policy work as a whole. At the same time we must be truly radical about challenging the roots of sexism, racism, homophobia, and all forms of discrimination in our companies, newspapers, television, schools, and all public bodies.

Our Greener Future

- Ecology
- Energy

Capitalism is destroying our planet, and this is another reason for a clear left alternative. Pro-market forms of green politics are failing to challenge the roots of our ecological problems in the profit system. Only a different form of economic management can save humanity from the twin dangers of planetary crisis and authoritarian solutions to that crisis.

Our democracy, our republic

- Republicanism
- Scottish independence
- Workplace and economic control
- The justice system

Democracy has become the dominant principle of subversive, anti-capitalist politics. The obvious indifference of elite political parties in the era of austerity is driving new social movements across Europe. In Scotland,

republicanism and independence are central to the case for economic justice. But we also want to see democracy thrive in our workplaces, justice system and in our economy as a whole. After decades of so-called apathy, the people have woken up, and they are demanding a radical change to the whole system, not just the routine of parliamentary elections.

Ukraine- Between peace and war

Three months after the signing of the Minsk-2 agreements, it is clear that the road to peace still seems very long. Ukraine today is characterized by very strong contrasts between the majority of the country, which has not experienced war, and the Donbass, where since April 2014 the forces of Kiev have confronted pro-Russian separatists, powerfully aided by Russia.

The Donbass, a zone disputed by both parties, has known since the cease-fire a very uneasy calm. When you enter the "zone of counter-terrorist operations" (ATO - this is how Kiev describes the military operations against the separatists) you realize the bitterness of the clashes. More than 6,000 dead - without knowing the losses of the pro-Russian separatists and of the Russian soldiers who came to lend a helping hand from the end of August - bear witness to the intensity of the fighting. Yet even in the part controlled by Kiev (about 60 per cent of Donbass), the traces of battle are undeniable. Life has resumed its course, but everyone knows that war can resume quickly. And clashes do resume regularly: shortly after our departure from the "front line" near Slovyansk, separatists started shooting again...

In fact, since nothing has been settled politically, the chances of prolonging this situation of "neither war nor peace" appear pretty slim. After the loss of Crimea, Kiev cannot bring itself to accept that of Donetsk and Luhansk, the two cities in the hands of pro-Russian separatists. The separatists, who want to seize the port of Mariupol, should, unless there are unexpected developments, go on the offensive quickly. Because according to them, their "People's Republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk are not viable without access to the sea...

There is something that is absolutely obvious: without the Russian intervention at the end of August 2014, when the separatists were being routed, the military conflict would have been over a long time ago.

Today the game is very uneven. The separatists have far more powerful weapons than the Ukrainian forces. Faced with the Russian war machine, which is running at full blast to provide the necessary support for the separatists, it is clear that what has allowed Kyiv to avoid a total disaster it is the spirit of the combatants, among others the volunteers, without whom the war would have been lost long ago. The Maidan generation, which brought down former President Yanukovich, remobilized as soon as the pro-Russian separatists started taking over several towns and cities in the Donbass. The morale of the volunteers on the front line remains very high, even though their armament is derisory faced with the separatists.

As Oleg Zontov, mayor of Slovyansk, the main city recaptured by Kiev from the separatists, said to us: "Here we aspire above all to peace, but everyone is afraid that the separatists are trying to recapture the town and this time they are seeking to control the whole of the Donbass. Which they have so far failed to do. European countries do not understand that what happens here concerns the whole of Europe, because Moscow now wants to forcibly redraw new frontiers."

The errors of the Kiev authorities after the fall of Yanukovich - such as the decision adopted the day after the departure of the ousted president to ban Russian as the second official language, whereas it is the language spoken by the majority of the inhabitants of the Donbass - have largely favoured the projects of the separatist oligarchs.

We do not see today the bases for an agreement. The Ukrainian government, which is facing a more than difficult economic situation, is advancing only slowly along the path of democratic reforms. The situation is even more complex because at present there is no progressive party in Ukraine capable of bringing together a large number of Ukrainians on the basis of an anti-capitalist platform, or even one that is just clearly anti-oligarchic. Ukraine is sorely lacking in trade unions that are really independent of the very powerful economic lobbies in this country.

Democratization will be real only when the Ukrainian state is able to put an end to the power of the oligarchs, who have up to now acted to prevent any reform that goes in the direction of greater social justice. These oligarchs naturally contribute to the corruption that, as in Russia, is found at all levels of society. There is a beginning of a struggle against the oligarchs in Ukraine, but for now Kiev has not yet managed to take a decisive step in dismantling the oligarchic power that has controlled everything since the independence of Ukraine in 1991. There is enormous resistance to any attempt at reform.

Maidan was a great spontaneous popular movement, whatever may be said about it, but it was then partially taken over by those who have only one goal: to prevent the end of oligarchic power. Nevertheless more and more Ukrainians aspire to do away with the oligarchs and with corruption in order to see the country take the road of democratic reforms. For now, with a Russia that is doing everything it can to make it impossible for there to be democratic change in Ukraine, it is hard to be optimistic in the short term.

It is unfortunately likely that the trials and tribulations are not over for Ukraine and its people, the vast majority of whom want to live in peace and with dignity, "like everyone else". In Slovyansk, although the

majority of the population watches Russian television, whose lying propaganda is very effective and very professional, people have lived already under the rule of the separatists. They do not want to recommence this experience, which was terrible for them, even though they repeat Russian propaganda about the Kiev authorities. At the same time, they live from day to day, without plans for the future: "Why renovate my home? Tomorrow I might have to flee from the war..." says a friend who is putting us up.

On April 22, back in Lviv, a major city in western Ukraine, we met the mayor, Andriy Sadovyi, leader of Samopomich ("Self-help"), a formation that created a surprise in the parliamentary elections in October 2014, obtaining over 11 per cent of the vote [1]. Noting that the country's unity is being challenged at present by the annexation of Crimea and the occupation by Russian forces of part of the Ukrainian Donbass, in support of the separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk, he believes that in the first place "it is crucial to succeed in re-establishing Ukraine's control over these territories." According to him, "the present truce is extremely fragile."

"The problem - he says - is that Moscow does not recognize its active involvement in the Ukrainian Donbass, which makes things very complicated. We can see clearly that the Minsk-2 agreements are still not being implemented. Moreover, I regret that the contact group which is responsible for trying to bring the Russian and Ukrainian viewpoints closer involves only Germany and France, and not the United States, which has significant influence in the world. The world is in a situation of great fragility due to the questioning by Moscow of the territorial integrity of an independent European country. Everyone knows that Russian military equipment crosses the borders of our country in large quantities and that thousands of Russian soldiers are in the Donbass.

In this situation it is difficult to advance quickly on the path of the reforms that are necessary to make Ukraine a country that is capable of joining the European Union. We must follow a difficult path, but I am optimistic in spite of the current situation. There are young people who have emerged in politics since the last elections and who want real change: to end the influence of the oligarchs who have put a stranglehold not only on the economy but also on political life. There is no alternative but to go forward. Since at present there is no alternative to the government coalition, it is from the inside that we must pursue the efforts to consolidate democracy, to face up to the consequences of the war that Russia is imposing on us and to carry out the necessary reforms. We will never accept a Ukraine that is amputated of part of the Donbass and Crimea."

We can clearly see: a firm stand against Russia.

We will talk more in the future about Sadovyi, who with his movement Samopomich wants to conduct politics differently. Because that is attractive to many young Ukrainians.

May 2015

Christian Kutzin and Olena Varakina recently stayed in Ukraine and were able to travel to the Donbass, as far as Slovyansk, a city that had been held by pro-Russian separatists until August 2014. They are regular readers of *Inprecor*, and sent this report to our sister magazine.

Germany- Teachers in Germany say no!

After several warning strikes and an indefinite strike of four weeks, which lasted until mid-June, the local government employers' association, responsible for agreements affecting two million public service employees, requested the aid of the mediation system which (by law) forced a break in the strike.

The proposal from the mediators consisted of an average wage increase of 3.4 %, which privileges management personnel (according to the mediators, nursery directors would get a wage increase of 4.5%), while for the vast majority of the staff concerned (teachers and other employees) the increase varied between 1 and 3%.

The leaders of the public services trade union Ver.di (one of the biggest union federations in the DBG – the German Trade Union federation) were ready to accept this proposal, but meetings of the staff concerned organized in Ver.di that took place at the end of June spoke out against the proposal of the mediators, not only in relation to the wage increase, but also in relation to the duration of the agreement, which was supposed to last for the very long period of five years.

A month ago we predicted that if the consultation among the staff affected and the resumption of negotiations with the employers in mid-August did not go well, a return to strike action was likely in the autumn. Consultation between the members of Ver. di and the GEW, a small teachers' union in the DGB, took place in July and the first few days of August; its result leaves no room for doubt: nearly 70% of those affected in the two trade unions rejected the proposal of the mediators, as did more than 60% of teachers and social workers organized in the DBB (the union of the state civil service, independent of the DBG).

As pointed out by the president of Ver.di, Frank Bsirske, this result "is a clear message to the leadership of the union as well as the employers"; and he added: "The strike will continue. Mediation has failed". On August 11, the committee on collective bargaining at the federal level will meet in Frankfurt to take a position. If

the employer does not back down in the negotiations that will take place on August 13, the struggle will resume its course in the following days, and it is hoped that there will be weeks of massive strikes.

The determination of the teachers has a simple explanation. The campaign developed to launch the strike marked as its objective achieving a real revaluation of educational work, traditionally regarded as feminine and, therefore, poorly paid. This revaluation with regard to wages meant matching other public employees with similar professional qualifications, which would mean an average wage increase of 10%.

Add to that the fact that the working conditions of teachers have increasingly got harder. Every day they are forced to respond to new tasks (integration, inclusion, preparation and so on) without a staff specifically trained for these tasks.

It is reassuring that, unlike six years ago, on this occasion, the legitimacy of the claims and the struggle of the teachers enjoy wide recognition among the public, while a significant number of parents affected by the strike have been in solidarity with them. A victory for the teachers would give encouragement to other sectors, especially those who are in the process of privatization and are victims of the deterioration in their working and living conditions.

Thus, for example, Lufthansa pilots are opposing new manoeuvres that attempt to increase profits at the expense of the people employed and the security of passengers. To improve their ability to compete with the low cost companies, Lufthansa wants to use old Airbus 330 and 340s for long journeys (Kenya, Mauritania or Mexico) and wants these to be flown by 200 pilots from its "autonomous" subsidiary CityLine, who have been trained and have experience only over short distances (Berlin-Dusseldorf or Cologne-Hamburg!). In addition, Lufthansa pilots experienced in long journeys should help the CityLine pilots to be trained in this new task!

The majority of pilots consider this plan, known as the "Jump", to be unacceptable: "Are we going to be responsible for eliminating our own jobs?" they ask, and they have offered a lot of arguments to prove that this plan is a danger to the safety of flight staff and users. If the Lufthansa management persists in this, we are at the gates of a new conflict. (See the Cologne newspaper *Express*, August 9, 2015.)

Catalonia- Exit stage Left?

The independence movement in Catalonia is gaining steam. Incorporating anti-austerity and democratic demands is the next step. Since September 11, 2012 — the National Day of Catalonia — the Catalan independence movement has burst onto the scene. The independence movement has steadily displayed its strength, from that year's gigantic 11S demonstration, to the [historic human chain](#) known as Vía Catalana (or Catalan Way), which spanned the country on September 11, 2013, and finally the [mass protest](#) in the form of a "V" (as in victory and vote) last September.

In the past two and half years the independence process has jumped from stage to stage. The 2012 demonstration marked its abrupt emergence and the confirmation that independence had become a central demand of Catalan society, one that would influence the political agenda in its immediate future. Throughout 2013 parties in favor of the sovereignty process, under the aegis of the [Catalan National Assembly \(ANC\)](#), the movement that has driven the entire process, began talks to set the conditions for holding the referendum.

The 2013 demonstration exerted decisive pressure compelling the parties to reach an agreement, which was announced on December 12, 2013. Accordingly, a referendum or "civic consultation" was set for November 9, 2014. It asked a [double question](#): "Are you in favor of Catalonia becoming a State? If so, do you wish it to be independent?"

The giant 11S "V" rally of 2014 represented the final phase of the pre-9N (November 9) mobilization and was designed as an act of mass mobilization to defy the referendum's prohibition announced in advance by the Spanish government of Mariano Rajoy, and to pressure the Catalan government into disregarding this prohibition. Following 9N and after long and tortuous debates on whether or not to present a unitary slate including all pro-independence parties for Catalonia's parliamentary elections, a new phase will culminate on [September 27](#), the date of the elections.

A review of the process begun in 2012 exposes Catalan politics as a prolonged figure skating contest in slow motion: the actors move very slowly, dramatize their gestures to infinity, and are keen to offer their best smile along with their best pirouettes.

First came the date and the question; then the long preparation for the referendum; next, the signing of the 9N Convocation Decree; after that, the agonizing debate over the elections announcement; and on and on — milestone after milestone, deferring the final outcome and unspeakably extending the film's plot, risking the loss of bored viewers and secondary actors in the middle of the show, of letting the climax and contained excitement evaporate.

But behind this permanent political slow-motion show stands a background of unprecedented instability — a slippery ice rink in which crashing and skidding toward the unforeseeable is a constant possibility. It isn't hard to imagine the president, the head of the opposition, and the whole of "organized civil society" stumbling uncontrollably to the floor.

In reality, the Catalan political system has imploded under the double impact of [15M](#) and the rise of the independence movement. These have caused an unprecedented crisis in the parties that have politically managed the post-Franco regime over the past four decades: Convergència i Unió (CiU, an electoral coalition among liberal Convergència and Christian-democratic Unió, in power since 2012 under the leadership of Artur Mas, and which governed continuously from 1980 to 2003 under the historical direction of Jordi Pujol), the Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC, social democrats opposed to the independence process), and the Popular Party (PP, the party of the Right heading the Spanish state though a minor power in Catalonia).

A particular political architecture is disappearing, while another is in the process of consolidation. This year promises to be a moment of truth, decisive in the resolution of the prolonged political crisis affecting the Spanish state and for the Catalan independence process. Successive elections (Andalucía on March 22, municipal and autonomous on May 24, Catalonia on September 27, and general elections by the end of the year or at the very latest January 2016) will be a test.

At the Spanish level, they will measure the capacity of the PP and PSOE (the center-left Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) to withstand [Podemos's](#) influence. In Catalonia, they will determine the relative strength of Mas and ERC (a center-left independence party and the other Catalan political force which has experienced a steady rise in voter preference in polls since 2012) in their fight for domestic hegemony in the independence process, as well as the strength or weakness of the latter, following the 9N referendum.

Within the long electoral cycle this year, September 27 and the upcoming general elections will condense popular expectations. For some, everything rides on a pro-independence majority voting on the first plebiscitary date. For others, a Podemos victory on the second date opens the door to the future.

A fork in the road to possible futures is clearly drawn. Not an absolute fork, perhaps, but a real one pointing to preferences, identities, projects, and different expectations. Looking ahead from below, not everyone sees and yearns for the same thing, nor does everyone envision common paths for arriving at the same destination.

Fixing our gaze over the limits of our imagination and glimpsing a better future that puts an end to an eternal, unending present constitutes the premise necessary for making possible that which does not yet exist.

Therein lays the strength of the present moment in which fissures of light pierce a formerly bleak and opaque future. But a bifurcated future that delineates apparently contradictory prospects casts a shadow of uncertainty and fear.

Like two magnetic fields that neutralize each other, could the independence process and Podemos weaken one another in Catalonia at the risk of both losing their decisive punch? Are both present ways out incompatible? Do they trace hopelessly divergent lines like two canoes carried by opposing undercurrents? Are they merely two parallel paths? Or is it possible to articulate them in convergent ways?

Today, this is the strategic, yet surprisingly nonexistent debate, that needs to be addressed from any perspective that aims to constitute a popular majority for change in Catalonia and to bring about democratic scenarios and rupture within the totality of the Spanish state.

The Post-9N Map

The November "civic consultation" ended the phase opened in September 2012 with the eruption of the independence movement. Holding a referendum or "consultation" became the main strategic objective of the independence movement and its central demand before the Spanish government, which remained opposed throughout.

The Spanish Constitutional Court's September 29, 2014 [ruling](#) against the Consultations Law adopted by the Catalan Parliament appeared to leave open two possible solutions: either capitulation by the Catalan government, canceling the referendum and rushing into early elections, or open confrontation, seeking to organize the referendum through institutional disobedience.

In the end, after an agonizing and convoluted process, where the thin red line separating comedy from tragedy was not always clear, the Catalan president used a last-minute ploy and, taking advantage of a legal loophole, chose to carry out a so-called "participatory process" instead of the referendum, deploying an organizational and institutional device that ensured the possibility of voting on November 9 (albeit with fewer poll sites than normal).

The 9N results, 2,305,290 votes (out of a total of 6,200,000 — the Catalan electorate usually comprises 5.2 million people, but this time all over the age of 16 and 900,000 foreign residents were allowed to vote), showed the strength of the sovereignty movement's civic and democratic thrust.

Participation was undoubtedly a success, considering institutional obstacles and the referendum's lack of formal recognition. 1,861,753 votes also demonstrated the solidity of the "Yes-Yes" block (recall that the referendum asked a double question: "Are you in favor of Catalonia becoming a State? If so, do you wish it to be independent?").

9N revealed a rather obvious reality: the independence movement has become hegemonic, yet lacks an overwhelming absolute electoral majority. Two minorities coexist alongside the majority and mobilized pro-independence block. One minority (generally passive and demobilized and only activated when voting for pro-Spain parties like the PP and Cs, an emerging anti-Catalan force) opposes the independence movement, while another relevant minority is rather indifferent to the independence movement but might favor the right to self-determination without making it a political priority.

The latter, however, is suspicious of the process opened after 2012, which it feels is headed by a neoliberal government that seeks to exploit the independence movement for its own benefit.

In reality President [Artur Mas](#) was forced to ride a pro-independence wave that threatened to smother him in September 2012 and to abandon the traditional pragmatic gradualism practiced by CiU. His ability to exploit the movement is not clear-cut. Without it, he would likely be finished, devoured by unpopular austerity politics.

The Independence explosion has allowed him to appear before the Catalan people as a statesman of historic stature (rather than a vulgar neoliberal manager at the service of finance) and organize an endless fight forward.

Despite this, he has suffered a continual decline in support over the past two years, leading to parity with ERC, which appeared more credible in its pro-independence conviction and less responsible for austerity policies (although as the opposition it has sustained Mas, approving his budgets and economic measures, arguing they are a necessary evil that will end as soon as independence is obtained).

Nonetheless, 9N success gave the Catalan president an unexpected boost, lifting him in the polls and portraying him once again as an indispensable independence leader.

This may be enough to ensure victory for Mas in the elections called for September 27, yet with a tight margin that underscores the main problems facing the Catalan right: the historical exhaustion of CiU as a political instrument capable of articulating a solid political and social majority, and its urgent need to re-found itself and elaborate a new political tool.

Halfway between an officially sanctioned referendum and a frontal act of institutional and civil disobedience which a formally held rebel referendum would have entailed, 9N amounted to a "disobedient detour" that avoided both surrendering to state impositions and direct institutional confrontation.

The Spanish government could not prevent a mass democratic event, but neither was there an act of explicit legal and institutional rupture coming from Catalonia that decisively precipitated developments. It was a last-minute farce that snuck through and handily maneuvered the challenge of holding a referendum that was more than rhetorical, yet fell short of pushing through unambiguous future scenarios.

In the end, 9N was a political and democratic success in that it opened a new stage; at the same time it failed to project an unimpeachable political message or draw an unquestionable roadmap, thus leading to a strange impasse. Somehow the 9N "participatory process" was the perfect formula for holding a referendum without doing so, and of not holding one by doing so.

Paradoxically, then, after 9N the independence process entered an impasse, marked by disagreements between the two main parties, Convergencia and ERC, on how to deal with the call for early elections. The Catalan National Assembly (ANC), the social movement that has driven the independence process since 2012, raised the need to convene early elections at the latest by March 2015, giving them a plebiscitary character, with a unitary independence slate led by Mas.

This proposal generated opposition between Convergencia and ERC. Both forces were almost tied in polls, with a trend towards a slight advantage by ERC before 9N and a rebound for Convergencia after 9N due to Mas's ability to capitalize on the referendum.

Convergencia emerged as the champion of the single slate, pointing out that without an agreement, it made no sense to hold elections. It thus exerted strong pressure on ERC, which opposed a unitary slate, viewing it as a Convergencia bear hug that blocked its future prospects. From 2012 to 9N in 2014 Convergencia declined in polls, against the rise of ERC, who appeared more credible in its commitment to independence and less tarnished by austerity policies.

Despite Convergencia's recovery, ERC acceptance of a single list meant not only blocking the possibility of future growth but also its final subordination to the machinery of Convergencia, a stronger, more structured party with solid organic links to business, financial, and media power.

ERC, for its part, advocated separate independence lists arguing that this facilitated reaching a broader spectrum of voters with a common programmatic point (the proclamation of independence), and appeared as the strongest supporter of independence calling for elections as soon as possible in order to initiate rupture with the Spanish state.

In pressuring ERC, Convergencia aimed either to force it to accept the unitary slate against its will, or simply to make it look like a sectarian party, thus placing its partisan interests above the current sovereign process.

Mas's wager on a unitary slate had two main motives: the first, of a conjunctural nature, was that the unity list guaranteed his continuity at the head of the government and dispelled the possibility of defeat.

The second, more structural, is the aforementioned need of the Catalan right to re-found its political space in light of Convergència's historical decline (its cyclical post-9N upturn notwithstanding).

His strategic goal was to put together a "president's list" that went beyond the party structures, enjoying the influence of relevant independentists and other actors, to become the embryo of a new centrist Catalan party (actually right-wing, of course). The aim was to reestablish a conservative political instrument riding the wave of the independence process, allowing Convergència to escape the blowback from austerity policies and corruption policies (in particular those of Jordi Pujol, the party's founder and president from 1980 to 2003) by reinventing itself in the new pro-independence stage.

The advantage of the pro-independence "single slate" was that, while in fact a deeply partisan strategy aimed at saving the Catalan right, it could be presented as a magnanimous strategy ("go beyond parties," "leave behind our differences and focus on what unites us") and drew from the genuine pro-unity sentiments among supporters of independence.

The tug of war begun after 9N between Convergència and ERC ended in a draw.

ERC resisted pressures for the unity slate, but had to accede to delaying elections until September 27. Convergència and Mas had to accept the impossibility of a single list, but in exchange achieved electoral costs for ERC (which always seemed to be on the defensive and to eschew the entire debate) along with delayed elections, thus buying itself more time, its historic specialty.

Throughout this debate, the ANC remained blocked and paralyzed. It shared Mas's advocacy of a single list, but it also agreed with ERC's proposal for immediate elections. It eventually accepted Mas's proposed calendar and the postponement of elections until September.

This whole debate reflected a clear dynamic: the gradual loss of the capacity by the ANC to take the initiative, which since 2012 had partially defined the political agenda, forcing the parties and the Catalan government to adapt to social movement pressures.

Institutional preparations for 9N and the subsequent handling of its success reinforced the president's position; he controlled the pace of the decisive moment, while the ANC made the tactical blunder of not supporting ERC's request for immediate elections with mobilizing pressure.

The entire post-9N discussion and resulting call to defer elections until September 27 generated a sense of impasse in the independence process, producing dead time of almost a year between the 9N and the next 27S, with no strategic justification. The spectacle around the unity list and its denouement has only exposed the strategic limits of the independence movement, trapped by the "national unity" approach.

Above all, it revealed the glaring absence of any strategic debate over what was really essential: how to broaden the social base of the movement, reaching in particular those sectors of the Catalan population who don't strongly identify with the independence demand and correspond sociologically to the bulk of working-class layers on the periphery of the Barcelona metropolitan area.

They are Spanish immigrants (or children or grandchildren of immigrants), whose first language is more often Spanish than Catalan, and whose media references (particularly radio and TV) are in Spanish and not Catalan.

This social sector overlaps in large measure with supporters of the Socialist Party of Catalonia, of the Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds-Esquerra Unida i Alternativa (a coalition of Greens and the Communist Party that has thirteen deputies in parliament after winning 9.89% of the vote in 2012) and with Podemos, the new rising star.

Thinking about how to broaden the independence movement's social base on this front would have undermined the main strategic bias of the process led by the ANC, and raised the need to accompany the independence claim with an emergency economic program against the effects of the crisis.

Podemos and Podem

Podemos's unexpected rise in Spain, and in turn Catalonia, has further complicated Catalan political life as well as the strategic alignments of left currents and their relationship to the independence process. Podemos was launched in January 2014 to field candidates for the May 25 European elections by a team of activists based primarily in Madrid.

Its initial project lacked a clear idea of what to do in Catalonia. European elections are based on a single Spanish district, requiring a particular electoral strategy for Catalonia (which represents a substantial 16 percent of the total Spanish population).

Rather than seeking to create and establish Podemos directly in Catalonia, its promoters' initial plan was to seek dialogue and join forces with existing Catalan political or sociopolitical forces.

Podemos founders were aware that Catalonia has a party system partially separated from the Spanish one and that the independence process had deeply shaken Catalan politics since 2012. However, the absence of any organized Catalan partner willing to team up with it forced a rushed creation of Podemos in Catalonia (called Podem).

Compared to other Spanish regions, it came about in a relatively weak state, with a relatively small capacity for militancy and the lowest electoral result of all [Autonomous Communities](#) (the administrative regions into which the Spanish state is divided): 4.6% compared to the 7.9% countrywide average.

The reasons for this weakness are related to the particular complexity of the Catalan political map and of the Left, in particular, which already comprises several Catalan projects and organizations, reducing the electoral, political, and militant space for Podemos.

Initially, the emergence of Podem was regarded as an anomaly by all Catalan political forces, believing that the new project would not fit into the complex Catalan context. Little by little, however, Podemos established itself in Catalonia, enjoying an electoral pull, a current of popular sympathy, and a very important militant influx. It emerged as a new and undeniable reality of Catalan politics that had come to stay, an unexpected shock to the already shaky Catalan political map.

When Podemos was launched in Madrid, it championed a novel democratic position in the Catalan independence debate, which is unfortunately absent from a political system dominated by the authoritarian behavior of the PP and the PSOE, diehard opponents of the right to self-determination and to the realization of the negotiated independence referendum.

[Pablo Iglesias](#), the leader of Podemos, adopted a democratic position that stood out in this context. He declared support for holding the Catalan referendum and announced he would abide by its outcome in case of a “yes” win, although he noted a preference for Catalonia remaining in the Spanish state.

Following the May 25 European elections, and in the context of a spectacular rise of Podemos in the polls, Iglesias’s statements have become more ambiguous with respect to the Catalan debate, due to Podemos’s electoral interests and his goal of winning the general Spanish elections scheduled for the end of 2015. Defending Catalonia’s right to self-determination is not popular in various parts of the Spanish state and can be easily used by the PP, the PSOE, and the media against Podemos.

Podemos leaders have adjusted their initial stance — unequivocal defense of Catalonia’s right to decide — while at the same time preserving an overall democratic (though ambiguous) position. It needs to uphold this democratic position, which is light years ahead of the PP and PSOE, if it cares about its electoral prospects in Catalonia.

In Catalonia, Podemos supporters, members, and voters have different opinions regarding the independence process. In general terms the bulk of its social base favors the democratic right to self-determination, without being pro-independence or making it a top political priority. Podemos’s Catalan leadership developed a discourse in favor of the right to self-determination, without defining its own position on the vote in the event of a legal referendum negotiated with the state.

During the 9N referendum, it maintained support for holding the referendum and opposed the prohibitions of [Mariano Rajoy’s](#) Spanish government, while refraining from calling for a vote either way.

All this places Podem in a difficult position in the independence process debate. Podemos is strong and credible and gains support around its criticism of corruption, traditional parties, and austerity policies. The independence process is a hot potato that places Podemos on the defensive when facing the gamut of pro-independence parties and Catalan media pressure. Podemos thus finds itself in an uncomfortable position that in the medium term can generate tensions and contradictions for its growth in Catalonia.

The emergence of Podemos has politically awakened a section of the Catalan people that is largely outside of (which does not mean opposed to) the political and social vision of the independence process and its representation of Catalonia as more homogenous in terms of national identities than it really is.

This Catalonia, in fact, had been losing its leading role since the workers’ movement fell apart as a central political and social actor, ceding ground to other social movements with greater weight in the middle classes in the full meaning of the term. Suddenly, a more diverse Catalonia, which in some ways had already burst abruptly into the public squares during the M15 anti-austerity mobilizations, made its presence felt, providing a more complex image of the country and its political system, and of the political alignments of its popular layers.

It is a Catalonia that has not been represented up to now (or which was represented by forces in decline), led by an alternative and rising political instrument. Indirectly it has complicated even further the political strategy to be followed by the popular forces, which face a complex interlacing of the social and national questions, and must weave together a complicated political architecture in terms of its identities.

A homogeneous people does not exist, nor does a linear “popular unity.” This is a diverse and heterogeneous people, whose collective identity is under construction and which, as far as its national identity and its relation with the independence process are concerned, has diverse inclinations and feelings.

This “people” includes those who enthusiastically attended the rally with Iglesias in the Vall d’Hebron in Barcelona last December 21, as well as those who participated the massive actions with Teresa Forcades and Arcadio Oliveres, promoters of the Procés Constituent socio-political movement (Forcades is a Benedictine nun known inter alia for her activism against pharmaceutical multinationals; Oliveres is an economist and a historical reference point for social movements). The same “people” who identify with David Fernandez (parliamentarian and spokesman for Candidates for Popular Unity, the anticapitalist and pro-independence political force unit with three seats in the Catalan Parliament, or 3 percent of votes).

Undoubtedly, it is a people who cannot be reduced to monolithic representations of “popular unity.” An image of an overly homogenous “people” might, at this decisive moment, lead to representing and pulling together only a minority, of taking the part for the whole. It might fail to generate a pole of attraction powerful enough to serve as the connecting point of a broad majoritarian bloc, one plural yet coherent in its (self-) representations.

How can we synthesize politically the popular bloc that today faces divergent possible futures and that remains partially divided with respect to the independence project? This synthesis, as complex as it is essential, as difficult as it is full of potential, is the winning formula in Catalonia. It is the equation that can defeat Mas and, at the same time, maintain the pro-sovereignty challenge in order to deal a well-aimed and perhaps decisive blow to the regime that Rajoy and PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez hope to keep afloat.

What is to be avoided is a fracture of the Catalan popular layers at the base of the sovereigntist process that results in, on the one hand, a minority alternative left (CUP, the sectors more to the left of ERC, etc.) within a pro-sovereignty bloc (with a political and electoral majority precariously united in everything else), led by CDC and the ERC leadership; and on the other hand, a democratic and anti-austerity pole, represented by Podemos, outside of the sovereignty process and, despite its electoral relevance, incapable of attaining a political and electoral majority in Catalonia.

An alternate “synthesis” perspective involves defending a post-September 27 act of effective sovereignty, both formal and substantive, by the parliament of Catalonia, that breaks with the legality of the 1978, post-Franco political framework without determining the final model of relations between Catalonia and the Spanish state. That is, it supports the opening of a Catalan constituent process that lays the basis for a new institutional framework and a new Catalan Republic, whose relationship to the Spanish state is to be discussed at the end of that process.

Those within the popular and working classes who have a pro-independence outlook, and those who do not, can now come together around the need for a unilateral act of sovereignty and the proclamation of their own republic, an action that would have two consequences.

First, it would open the door to discussing what model of country we want in Catalonia, and therefore to “decide on everything” — precisely what Mas does not want. Second, it would pose an unprecedented institutional challenge to the legal framework of 1978 and the Rajoy government, and take a substantive step forward along the path expressed on November 9.

The corollary of this approach must be to insert the opening of a Catalan constituent process into a state-wide perspective aiming to initiate autonomous, national and sovereign constituent processes with feedback mechanisms, in order to put an end to the Regime of 1978.

A Catalan constituent process is neither subsidiary to nor dependent on a Spanish one, nor should it ignore what is happening in the state as a whole. On the contrary, a strategic articulation of the various sovereignties can help smash the pillars of the battered post-Franco political and institutional framework.

Podemos and the independence process thus pose a challenge to each other.

First, Podemos must build a national-popular project in the state as a whole, compatible with a pluri-national conception of the current Spanish state, with the right to self-determination for its component nations, and without any hierarchical relationship, be it political or symbolic, among them.

This implies a clear defense of the right of the Catalan people to decide, the guarantee of a binding referendum, and above all the acceptance of the right (which does not necessarily imply agreeing with how it is exercised) of the people of Catalonia to decide unilaterally their future given the present impossibility of doing so through a legal, mutually agreed upon referendum process.

Secondly, Podemos has to construct its own project in Catalonia. It must root itself in Catalanismo and relate (in order to attract them) to a sector of the pro-independence social bases, beginning with those of an ERC that is finding it increasingly difficult to justify to a portion of its electorate its permanent subordination to Mas.

Between backing the independence process and moving only outside of its confines, there is space for a relevant force in Catalonia — but not for one that aspires to prop up a winning majority.

Podemos and Podem put forth to the independence process, including its principal political and social protagonists, beginning with the Catalan National Assembly (ANC), the need to dialogue with an emerging political movement that crystallizes a discontent distinct from independence demands.

Podem galvanizes a social sector that is (at least partially) outside the independence process (though it does not identify with the Spain of Rajoy and Sánchez) and, at the same time, speaks to sectors within that process that might swing away from it given the new possibilities of change offered by Podemos.

The new Catalan and Spanish political context forces the pro-independence movement to reconsider objectives and strategies.

The first and most important step is to widen its popular social base, which is impossible without inserting an explicit social dimension into the movement. The second is to be able to articulate a dialectical vision between an accumulation of forces peculiar to Catalonia and a rupture at the state level with the institutional framework of the Regime of 1978, seeking synergies and mutual support through the defense of sovereign constituent processes.

Unfortunately, the importance of both tasks has been highlighted by their absence in the debate of recent months, which has been ridiculously centered on the advisability of a single independence list on September 27, starkly illustrating the strategic limits of the approach of the ANC and the pro-independence mainstream. Very big challenges on the one hand, but strategic small-mindedness on the other. A bad combination, for sure.

[[[Strategic Limits, Strategic Mistakes

The current impasse in the independence process is the result of its own strategic limits and of the weaknesses of its foundational framework, which delinks the independence claim from any substantive social content and concrete measures for working-class social improvements. The ANC's opening strategic mistake was the construction of a broad, majoritarian movement of "national unity" devoid of a clear social dimension, since the mere demand of independence was enough to pull together a majority.

The limits to this approach had been pointed out for some time by political sectors like the Procés Constituent and the Candidates for Popular Unity.

The focus on "national unity," on "first independence, then we will see," puts the abstract nation above the concrete one, Catalonia above Catalans. It fails to see that providing the independence process with a citizens' rescue plan, a social emergency package, does not divide or fragment it. On the contrary, it strengthens it. Catalan society is deeply divided — torn apart, in fact — by four years of austerity policies and more than three decades of neoliberalism.

Unity is not possible if the causes of the fissure are evaded, especially if those heading the unity are perceived by many citizens as responsible for the social meltdown and as the pillars of a political system that only generates growing discontent.

Ignoring immediate social needs and uncritically accepting Mas's leadership is what divides and pits the social against the national, creating a playing field that breathes air into the Catalan right (even while forcing it to step on the accelerator and push its cardiovascular capacity to the max). It facilitates disappointment and apathy around the sovereignty process for those segments of Catalonians who, politically and culturally, identify less with Catalanismo.

Any unity that artificially attempts to eliminate the multiple contradictions cutting across Catalan society ends up harming itself, kicking an unfortunate (and unnecessary) goal into one's own net in the game's first minute. The combination of, on the one hand, a national claim bereft of an explicit social dimension and, on the other, Mas as political head of the independence process (despite not controlling it and just barely surfing its wave), has been lethal for efforts to broaden its social base from below beyond its initial impetus.

The paradox of the situation is that while independence activists explicitly separate national demands from social ones during large demonstrations, the latter are present in a latent form. Those calling for independence do so mostly because they think it will mean more democracy and equality. Taken as a whole the sovereignty movement has great democratic potential. Behind the independence claim is the strong democratic aspiration, common to all current struggles, to be able to decide and control one's destiny in a moment that appears gloomy and dark.

Absent other alternatives, independence appears a concrete solution to the current crisis, a credible and tangible proposal pointing to a possible future that is not diluted by a present of endless crisis. The bulk of middle and popular classes advocating independence do so because they think they it will improve their lives, is the starting point for building a more just and solidaristic country, and is a chance to wipe the slate clean.

But paradoxically, independence per se, as defined by the main actors behind the sovereignty process, does not guarantee any of this. Little will change in an independent Catalonia in the hands of CiU and ERC, in which the influence of the families and firms that dominate the country remained intact.

The construction of a Catalan Republic opens possibilities but does not guarantee their realization. This will require pushing the democratic envelope of the sovereignty drive, extending the right to decide to all spheres. All this, of course, is antithetical to Mas's project.

Bifurcated Futures

How different might things have been if the September 2012 independence call had included a basic social emergency program? What if the 11S, 2013 V demand for independence had also clamored for an anti-crisis package addressing the humanitarian emergency?

What would have happened if alongside the “President, open the polls!” demand by ANC President Carme Forcadell there had been a “President, enact a social emergency program!”? Where would we be if the November 9 Referendum Convocation Decree signed on September 27, 2014 had been accompanied by a battery of basic citizen rescue measures?

The answer is clear: Mas would have done far worse on the political stage; the center-left and left forces involved in the independence process would have performed in a more favorable arena; and the political and social organizations disconnected from the independence process, from the leading unions to alternative social movements and their social bases, would have tilted towards it.

Social support for the process would have broadened on the popular and working-class front. Naturally, the behind-the-scenes wheeling-and-dealing by Catalonia’s financial oligarchy to halt the sovereignty process would also have been even more intense, as would have been the contradictions within Mas’s party, Convergència. The party would have had a difficult time distancing itself from the process and, had it done so, would have self-destructed.

Any discussion of a broadening of the sovereignty process might have (wrongly) seemed abstract in its initial stage, from 2012 until 2014. But with the current impasse, and with the consolidation of Podemos and Podem, it is now very tangible. It is now unavoidable, whether by conviction or for instrumental purposes.

Those who exclusively defend independence (or at least those for whom it determines everything else) and do not sympathize with 15M and its legacy nor with the anti-austerity spirit of popular mobilizations, are forced to confront an unambiguous reality: the urgent strategic need to give the sovereignty process a popular dimension in order to widen its social base.

This is what that the ANC must address if it wants to strengthen the process and make sure it does not run out of gas — the need for the independence push to contain a seed that will build a more egalitarian country.

And, in parallel fashion, those of us who situate ourselves in the camp of popular emancipation from below, in the overlapping social and national struggles and in the fight against all forms of oppression and inequality, face the unprecedented challenge of having to merge the bifurcated futures of Catalan popular layers that are not irremediably moving away from one another. It is a challenge that simultaneously points to unprecedented opportunities and exciting risks.

With elections called for September 27, the challenge is to put together a successful popular bloc that breaks with the Mas-ERC coalition — one that puts another alternative on the table and points to new possibilities. This means breaking from the political and discursive framework fixed by Mas (and the other central actors of Catalan politics), no longer pretending to stand alongside him, but rather to reformulate the debate on independence and sovereignty: carrying those concepts to the end, drawing on the democratic thread, extending them to cover all spheres and thus proposing a democratic and participatory Catalan constituent horizon as a framework for shared convergence of all the processes of change.

Right to decide? Of course, but on all subjects, beginning with economic policy. Independence and sovereignty? Yes of course, but then let’s talk about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Plebiscitary elections? Why not. But on all issues, not only on independence. On Mas himself, on the cutbacks, on austerity, on corruption.

With that focus, the possible futures, now bifurcated, can begin converge. From that point on, there is no reason to limit the scope of our dreams or our confidence in our options.

Translated by René Rojas.

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USA- Sanders and Black Lives Matter: The Great Debate of Our Time

For the first time in decades a great debate about the priorities and the program of the American people is taking place not among small groups of leftists but in society at large. The debate between Sanders and Black Lives Matter—on social media, on TV and radio, in the newspapers, and on the street—is one of the most important discussions of our time and could if it is deepened help us all to find a way forward against both capitalism and racism. What appears to some only as conflict could lead to the construction of a new analysis and lay the basis for a new and broader social movement. We should all become involved in this debate and help to further it toward the common goal of a society of equality, democracy, and solidarity.

While many people on the left—both Sanders supporters and BLM activists—have sometimes seen this confrontation of opinions as conflict alone, it is in reality a progressive development, even if also sometimes

painful experience, out of which could come a common understanding of a need for both economic and racial justice in America. The debate is only beginning and we have a long way to go, but how we interpret and approach this most important discussion could well influence its outcome. We should view this new national discussion as a positive development. We should support Black Lives Matter in pressing Sanders, while at the same time embracing the Sanders' supporters who oppose economic inequality. And the debate remains incomplete until Sanders supporters also decide challenge him to change his position on the U.S. military, U.S. foreign policy, and Israel. We should work to bring this critique into the debate.

Remember Where We Were Five Years Ago

What has happened already is really remarkable. Think where we were five years ago when the Tea Party dominated the political conversation until Occupy Wall Street drove it off the scene, turning our national discussion. Then Bernie Sanders, for years the independent and self-styled socialist from Vermont, decided to run for president as a Democrat on a program aimed to fight economic inequality and the role of money in politics. He also addressed the environmental catastrophe and the status of women in America. His demand for higher wages, for free public education, and for universal health care represent a challenge to the Republicans and to the Democrats who have spent the last few decades shredding social programs and subsidizing the corporations and demanding austerity. Hundreds of thousands of people around the country responded to Sanders' campaign turning out in massive numbers for rallies and house meetings and providing in small, individual donations, millions of dollars to finance his campaign.

But at first he had little to say to African Americans, though the Black Lives Matter movement, a phenomenon much like Occupy, had begun only a few months before. The Black Lives Matter movement as we all remember began about a year ago after the police killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. The pain and anger of those and several other police killings fueled a powerful new Black liberation movement. Black Lives Matter set out to challenge America's institutional racism, particularly in the legal system, the courts and the police. But Black Lives Matter activists also spoke out against institutional racism in housing, education, and health care.

When Sanders launched his campaign, Black Lives Matter began to challenge him because his political program had virtually nothing to say about racism in American society. Black Lives Matter disrupted Sanders' rallies on two occasions, insisting that he and his supporters recognize the significance of racism in American society and speak to it. Sanders, who had been a member of CORE and SNCC and who had one of the most progressive voting records on civil rights issues, responded positively to the challenge of Black Lives Matter by publishing a [racial justice platform](#) that speaks to the issues raised by Black Lives Matter.

The Sanders campaign and Black Lives Matter are now engaged in one of the most important debates about political movements and social program in modern American history. There has been nothing like this either in terms of the national scope or the depth of the discussion since the early 1970s. We have had social movements, but no really significant discussion about the future of our country for over 50 years. Neither Sanders nor Black Lives Matter has so far produced a political program for the American people, but now in their debate—which is taking place among millions of working class Americans of all races—this clash of ideas could begin create a program for all of us: economic equality, gender equality, and racial justice.

The confrontations have sometimes been painful for both sides as Black Lives Matter activists felt that they had to shout to be heard, even by the left, and some Sanders supporters went on the defensive while others felt that their candidate should move more quickly to recognize his problem in dealing with the new civil rights movement and deal with it. Some, apparently including Sanders, as indicated by the Sanders' campaign's development of a [new chant to drown out protestors](#). Hillary Clinton's security guards kept Black Lives Matter activists from interrupting one her rallies, though afterwards she [shrewdly attempted to charm a group of the Black activists in a private meeting](#). These attempts to stop or to attenuate the debate will surely fail. The debate will continue until not only the candidates and their parties but most American people recognize our society's racist character—which is to say the debate will go on until we sweep this social system away.

This debate is limited by the fact that it is taking place around Sanders' primary campaign in the Democratic Party, a party that represents the American corporations and the capitalist system, a party that can never resolve the issues of economic inequality, racism, militarism and imperialism. We have to say that to Sanders too, demanding that he break his promise to support the Democratic Party nominee, most likely Hillary Clinton, if and when he loses in the primary. We will only ultimately make progress when we fight free of the Democratic Party. Still, this debate presents, the movements for social justice and the American people at large a wonderful opportunity to think through the program needed by our society and particularly by its working people, women, African Americans and Latinos, and other people who suffer discrimination.

Interestingly, while Sanders is a Democratic candidate, this debate is not taking place principally within the Democratic Party (though it is having some impact there) but rather among leftists, among social movement activists, among rank-and-file union members, and in the American public at large. The other Democratic Party candidates will be forced to take up both the economic and racial issues—though we should have no hope that they will actually do much about them, certainly not while there is no mass movement pressuring

them. Our job should be to take this discussion into our workplaces, social meeting places, schools and colleges, and places of worship. We want all Americans involved in this debate.

Division or the Struggle for Unity

[Arun Gupta has argued](#) that the Sanders campaign is leading to divisions in the movement, and drawing people toward the elite and away from the movement. Gupta apparently sees only division and no possibility of reconciliation and eventual unity between those who have emphasized economic programs and those who have prioritized the fight against racism. Yet, we could be witnessing the beginnings of a synthesis of these different points of view and of the movements they have historically represented—labor and the Black and Latino movements principally.

Once has, of course, to be realistic about this. The debate between Sanders and Black Lives Matter will not be able in several months to overcome hundreds of years of both institutional racism and widespread racist attitudes and behavior. Overcoming the long, exploitive and violent history of racism in America will require a powerful social movement, new social policies, and radical, fundamental change in American society. The Sanders campaign in the corporate-dominated Democratic Party is not the ideal interlocutor in this debate. And the young Black Lives Matter movement has yet to cohere into a national organization with its own recognized leadership and program that might put forward a more systematic analysis and program. Nevertheless, both sides have put forward clear enough positions and the debate as we have it represents a tremendous step up in American politics.

We should be contributing to the debate to push it forward. As many of the left have suggested, this is still not sufficient. Sanders need to take a position against U.S. militarism and imperialism and to break with support of Israel. Most important, we should approach this debate positively. We may be at the beginning of building a new movement that combines the fight for greater economic equality with the demand for racial justice, perhaps a movement for socialism.

August 13

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USA- Connecting Sanders' Audience's Aspirations to Clear Working Class Political Alternatives

The following document was discussed at Solidarity's 2015 Convention last weekend and approved by a majority vote, with the addendum that our organization also has many members engaged in the Green Party and that we support their work and the Jill Stein campaign. This resolution is intended to outline an approach to the Sanders campaign and his supporters, and not as an evaluation as Sanders himself or his political views.

Solidarity understands the strategic imperative of organizing a mass base for independent working class political action that unites working people, the independent social movements, and organizations of the oppressed in a battle for their common interests against capitalism and its political representatives. Unlike those on the left who continue to see the Democratic Party as a lesser evil that can be influenced from within, we regard the Democratic Party as unreformable, committed to imposing capital's neoliberal project. History has shown all too many times that the Democratic Party remains the graveyard of social movements. We reject being drawn into the slippery slope of Democratic Party politics.

Nevertheless, any significant advance in independent working class politics requires a fracturing away of the Democratic Party's mass base. As an austerity-first party, Democratic lesser-evilism has lost much of its allure. We strongly disagree with Bernie Sanders' approach of running in the Democratic primary and his pledge to support the Party nominee. However, it would be a mistake for the left not to recognize the enormous significance and potential inherent in the millions of people rallying around his campaign looking to fight against corporate America and what they perceive as the highjacking of the democratic process. Despite Sanders running as a Democrat, we appreciate the significance of the mass support he is receiving for his basic message. It is the message of Occupy—the 99% versus the 1%—proving that eight years into the devastating recession and deepened neoliberal austerity presided over by the Obama administration it is very much alive and embedded in the consciousness of big layers of the US population. This is particularly true of young people who are just entering national electoral politics inspired by Sanders' message.

We should welcome this outpouring of fight back spirit, and seek to work together on the issues they raise while emphasizing that a Democratic Party orientation is a dead end; and instead win them over to the need for independent politics and building movements that can change society. We urge Solidarity members, those we can influence, as well as other revolutionary socialists to find ways to connect with the millions of people who are being drawn to the Sanders campaign, most of whom will have no patience for the Democratic Party

establishment, much less see themselves in an ongoing fight to take the leadership of the Party. This is a key audience to connect with and make inroads into if we are to accomplish any sort of breakthrough for independent left politics. Many Sanders supporters are already involved in, or can be won to, organizing ongoing independent anti-austerity and other social movements, to local independent electoral campaigns, and to the Green Party's fledgling effort to build a national independent party/movement.

We are supportive of the rank and file rebellions within labor, such as the independent, grassroots Labor for Bernie formation, that are developing around this election. They provide an opportunity to discuss what program and objectives should drive labor's political choices. The rebellion and disgust with bureaucrat driven, transactional, business as usual politics poses the need, and possibility, to build rank and file networks within labor that demand a real democratic process of endorsements, and that fight to hold the bureaucrats accountable to supporting only candidates that actually support union policies. Political endorsements will not "save" our unions or the working class. But a struggle over internal democracy inside our unions such as the one that has erupted in the AFT can build rank and file power.

Our job as socialists in the labor movement includes a strategy of fostering cracks in labor's slavish alignment with the Democratic Party establishment. A fissure in terms of a Sanders endorsement is a good thing. We are not indifferent to this fight. A mass, independent working class party will not be created in this country without the activity of the labor militants who are supporting the Sanders campaign. This is also the milieu of labor activists that grasp the necessary task of building the political capacities of workers—something far beyond the scope of any electoral insurgency.

We should embrace movements and mobilizing efforts around specific demands that grow out of the Sanders campaign. There is now a call by young people activated by the campaign for a million student march on Washington this fall, building on Sanders' call to make public universities and colleges tuition free.

We have yet to see the emergence of a large-scale challenge to austerity and a clear working class political alternative at the national level. An effective left politics, one that can win and implement a left program, requires an organizational infrastructure and political culture that does not exist right now. With a lack of ongoing, successful independent left politics, we have to contend with the reality that anger at the corporate control of politics reflects itself in vague populism and often within the Democratic Party.

We recognize that electoral initiatives like those of Kshama Sawant in Seattle, the late Chokwe Lumumba in Mississippi, the Vermont Progressive Party, the Richmond Progressive Alliance, United Working Families in Chicago, Howie Hawkins Green Party campaign, and others, while they have their limitations and problems, represent a challenge to the hold of the Democratic Party establishment. We support efforts to run pro-worker and labor candidates as independents or on the ballot line of non-corporate parties.

We are interested in working with people who are attracted to a campaign that warns that, "The best president in the history of the world ...will not be able to address the major crises that we face unless there is a mass political movement, unless there's a political revolution in this country." We should emphasize Sanders' call for building an ongoing movement beyond this election cycle. Yes, we do not expect the Sanders campaign itself to build lasting grassroots organization. The ball is in our, broadly defined, court. We should seize this potential organizing opportunity, reaching out to people excited by the Sanders campaign with the message, "Let's not waste this moment where folks are coming together around an anti-corporate, anti-austerity program by ending with the whimper of voting for Hillary and calling it a day. Let's build up our power." The tragedy would not be so much people pulling the lever for Clinton, but dissipating and disbanding this mass outcry, having nothing to show for our bottom up efforts.

Jesse Jackson, despite winning 8 million votes in 1988, chose to demobilize the ostensibly independent Rainbow Coalition organization after losing the Democratic nomination so no ongoing coalition went on to continue working around issues of economic and racial justice after the campaign ended. This time, the left should urge Sanders supporters to keep the fight going through joining anti-austerity struggles, social movements or building local, multi-racial coalitions, including independent electoral infrastructures, that live on well after the presidential campaign.

We agree with Howie Hawkins when he says: "We should talk about why independent politics is the best way to build progressive power, about the Democratic Party as the historic graveyard of progressive movements, and about the need in 2016 for a progressive alternative when Sanders folds and endorses Clinton. I don't expect many will be persuaded to quit the Sanders campaign before the primaries. But I do expect that many of them will want a Plan B, a progressive alternative to Clinton, after the primaries."

USA- Moynihan's Anti-Feminism

The Moynihan Report naturalized patriarchy and rationalized inequality. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 government report, "The Negro Family," argued that the "unstable" family structure of many African Americans — as reflected in high rates of female-headed families and out-of-wedlock births — was the primary barrier to attaining racial equality.

For half a century, the Moynihan Report [has been](#) used to justify racial and class inequality.

Today, on the report's fiftieth anniversary, Moynihan's conclusions have [bipartisan support](#) . Conservative think tanks celebrate their supposed prescience. Conservative pundits and politicians use the report's logic to argue that the blatant injustices recently highlighted in [Ferguson](#) , [Baltimore](#) and elsewhere result from family structure, not exploitation and oppression.

Liberals claim Moynihan for their camp, as well, correctly pointing out that he was a liberal who advocated expanded jobs measures. But in doing so, they avoid challenging his flawed understanding of racial inequality as rooted in family structure rather than in political economy and institutional racism. Contemporary liberals, concerned with fixing a "culture of poverty," also forget that Moynihan's assumptions were deeply embedded in mid-twentieth-century liberalism, which advocated a "[family wage](#)" for men that made women economically dependent on their husbands. In the 1960s, many feminists recognized the flaws in Moynihan's analysis. To African-American feminists in particular, Moynihan propagated a pernicious myth of black "matriarchy" that combined racism with sexism. They noted that many male Black Power radicals shared Moynihan's idea that achieving racial equality required black men [to be patriarchs](#) . For instance, African-American activist [Pauli Murray](#) was outraged when she first read in Newsweek about the Moynihan Report and how it endorsed increasing economic opportunities for African-American men at the expense of jobs available to African-American women.

Born in 1910, Murray spent her career combating both the racial discrimination of Jim Crow and the gender discrimination she termed "Jane Crow." A single African-American woman frustrated by the male monopoly of her chosen profession of law, Murray identified with "the class of unattached, self-supporting women for whom employment opportunities were necessary to survival . . . the ones most victimized by a still prevalent stereotype that men are the chief breadwinners."

Writing to Newsweek's editor, Murray questioned Moynihan's assumption that black women claimed a "disproportionate share" of white-collar and professional jobs versus black men. Moynihan's talk of African-American "matriarchy," she complained, did "a grave disservice to the thousands of Negro women in the United States who have struggled to prepare themselves for employment in a limited job market which . . . has severely restricted economic opportunities for all women as well as for Negroes."

Unlike Moynihan, Murray applauded African Americans' relatively gender-equal educational attainment, particularly since so many African-American women served as heads of family. Black women's economic achievements, Murray insisted, did not cause black men's low economic position. "It is bitterly ironic," she protested, "that Negro women should be . . . censured for their efforts to overcome a handicap not of their making and for trying to meet the standards of the country as a whole."

Newsweek refused to publish Murray's letter, and Murray's critique of Jane Crow was largely suppressed or ignored during early public debate about the Moynihan Report. Nevertheless, Murray foreshadowed important feminist challenges to the male-breadwinner ideal stimulated by the report.

In the mid-1960s, feminists organized to demand equal access to employment, challenging systematic gender discrimination that reserved the best jobs for men on the grounds that they were the primary supporters of their families. Murray and others argued that the 1964 Civil Rights Act would only benefit African-American women if it prohibited both racism and sexism. While the act did prohibit gender discrimination in employment, feminists had to pressure the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to fully enforce it, as administrators initially focused solely on racial discrimination.

In 1966, Murray, Betty Friedan, and others [founded](#) the National Organization for Women (NOW) to push employment rights for women. Today, the mainstream feminism NOW represented in the Sixties is often regarded as elitist, solely concerned with securing rights for affluent white women, but in reality, the campaign for equal employment opportunities benefited all women workers, especially those who could not rely upon the family wage system. [Mary Dublin Keyserling](#) , head of the Women's Bureau in the Department of Labor from 1964 to 1969, shared NOW's critique of the Moynihan Report and resented Moynihan's dismissal of equal employment for women. Keyserling was part of a small network of white feminist opponents of the Moynihan Report who served in the Johnson administration. Keyserling's roots were in a different liberal tradition from Moynihan's — she had been integral to a circle of left-liberal feminists in the 1930s and 1940s who worked within government to combat gender inequality along with class and race inequality.

Like other feminists, Keyserling offered a different vision from Moynihan of how to help lower-class women. Instead of creating male-headed nuclear families, she believed public policy should improve women's wages so they could better support families on their own. Though Keyserling worried about "family breakdown" among African Americans, she thought it absurd to cite the wage labor of African-American women as its cause. She believed that African-American women's economic contributions were a "stabilizing and enriching factor" for families.

Keyserling was particularly alarmed by the "assurances" of a Washington, DC job training center: "We are not encouraging women. We're trying to reestablish the male as the head of the house." To this she objected that it was crucial to provide job opportunities to African-American women since so many of them supported their families on low-wage jobs. She pleaded, "let us not fall into the error of believing that we solve an

unemployment problem by trying to take one group of people out of jobs they are now in and which they need desperately, in order to open employment opportunities for others.”

The Moynihan Report also angered Martha Griffiths, Democratic representative from Michigan and key proponent of the feminist Equal Rights Amendment. In a letter to Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz publicized in the press, Griffiths protested, “It is high time to disperse the syrupy miasma flowing from the Moynihan report that ‘Negro women have it good,’ when the facts are just the opposite and produce detrimental effects on their economic progress.” Griffiths slammed the Department of Labor for focusing exclusively on African-American male unemployment, ignoring similarly high rates of joblessness among African-American women.

When Moynihan learned of Griffiths’s letter, he requested a copy. Misreading her opposition as misunderstanding, Moynihan tried to convince her that “part of the outburst against that report of mine came from a kind of fire-breathing feminist type who is fighting against attitudes that simply no longer exist.” Moynihan was so steeped in family wage ideology that he could not comprehend why feminists objected to targeting job opportunities solely at African-American men.

Merrilee A. Dolan’s 1971 position paper (commissioned by NOW) castigated Moynihan’s myopic focus on the male-breadwinner family: “His entire report is a strong statement on the desirability of patriarchy. It is a plea for the government’s poverty policies to strengthen the patriarchal system and leave women to the mercy of a man’s economic support.” That no one yet had publicly criticized the report as a “pure slander of women” proved “just how patriarchal our society is.”

Dolan’s judgment of the Moynihan Report was unequivocal: “nearly everything imaginable is wrong with it.” Her paper reflected the influence of African-American feminists (including Murray, whom she cited) and was particularly inspired by the welfare rights movement, which called attention to the economic exploitation of poor women, especially women of color.

Dolan reiterated the movement’s focus on poverty’s structural causes: “People are poor for one reason — the economic system in the United States is not structured to eliminate poverty, and it is not intended to be. It depends upon a cheap reserve of labor — extracted primarily from women and minorities and especially minority women.”

Unlike earlier feminists such as Murray, Dolan saw women’s unequal economic opportunities as part of a broader system of male domination, and the Moynihan Report as an attempt to impose the patriarchal family model upon poor African-American women.

“Government meddling in women’s lives to try to force them to hook male ‘breadwinners,’” she declared, “is certainly totalitarian, even if it is done through economic coercion measures.” Unlike Moynihan, Dolan advocated policies to enable female financial self-sufficiency so that a woman could make her “own decisions about how and with whom she shall live (and sleep).”

On Moynihan’s failure to support child care centers, Dolan remarked, “Moynihan would prefer to avoid this expensive proposition and force women to compete for mates — no matter their personal preference.” Again taking her cue from African-American feminists, Dolan challenged Moynihan’s language of “illegitimate” births, claiming the term should be abandoned as it “degrades both women and children who are not the property of a man” and prized “legal status on a piece of paper” above the love and care for children.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, radical African-American feminists battled the Moynihan Report in a proxy war against the patriarchal ideals of African-American men. By criticizing the Moynihan Report, black feminists such as [Frances Beale](#) challenged the black male radical who “when it comes to women . . . seems to take his guidelines from the pages of the Ladies’ Home Journal.”

The report provided an indirect target for black feminists wary of alienating black male radicals, whom they saw as crucial allies in the fight against racism. Highlighting black male radicals’ commonalities with Moynihan would force them to reexamine their gender ideology. Far from being part of a distinctively African-American culture, black feminists argued, patriarchy was simply the white middle-class ideal.

Black feminists pointed out that African Americans who complained about “emasculatation” and “matriarchy” agreed with Moynihan. Joanna Clark compared “the brother nattering away about how we’ve been lopping off balls long enough, it’s time to stand aside” with “people like Moynihan carrying on about our matriarchy and [urging black women to] confine ourselves to standing behind the man of the family.” For black feminists, the Moynihan Report illustrated the interconnected oppression of African Americans, women, and the poor. They found its racism, sexism, and defense of capitalism inextricable.

In the late 1960s, feminists were not the only vocal critics of the nuclear family norm. They were joined by a growing number of men who rejected the Moynihan Report’s equation of masculinity and breadwinning.

In 1968, black sanitation workers [on strike in Memphis](#) carried posters reading “I Am a Man,” powerfully conveying their demand to be treated with dignity, and signaling their association of masculinity with breadwinning and men’s inability to support their families as an indictment of economic inequality. Yet, around the same time, critics began challenging the conception of masculinity — illustrated by the Moynihan Report — that valorized financially supporting a dependent wife and children.

African-American writer [Albert Murray](#) questioned whether middle-class masculinity was worth emulating. Moynihan, he claimed, “implies without so much as a blush that all the repressions, frustrations, and neuroses of the white Organization Man add up to an enviable patriarchal father image rather than the frightened insomniac, boot-licking conformist.”

Male homosexuality was an important subtext in discussions of black masculinity prompted by the Moynihan Report. Moynihan relied on the postwar social science tradition that viewed black men as prone to homosexuality because of their inability to play conventional patriarchal roles.

Though the report did not explicitly mention homosexuality, it linked masculinity to supporting a woman financially, and in a 1966 report to the Carnegie Foundation, Moynihan argued that black male homosexuality endangered his goal of increasing the number of black male breadwinners. Moynihan specifically worried about the large number of incarcerated African-American men because he feared prison might turn them gay.

For some critics, the Moynihan Report’s plan to use the military to bolster African-American masculinity was the report’s most disturbing aspect. The [escalation](#) of the Vietnam War after 1965 dramatically altered the context of Moynihan’s suggestion, and although he never enthusiastically supported the war and had turned against it by 1967, Moynihan continued to push for the army to recruit more African-American men because soldiering was historically “a path of upward mobility for those born rude and poor.” Moynihan believed military service would pave the way for African-American success as it had for him and other white ethnics who served during World War II.

The report and Moynihan’s earlier arguments in a 1963 government report, “One-Third of a Nation,” shaped government policy. In 1966, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced [Project 100,000](#) to enable those who failed the selective service exam to enter the armed forces.

To publicize the program, the Department of Defense claimed that military service would aid disadvantaged Americans, though they mainly needed more men to fight in Vietnam. The program failed as an antipoverty measure but succeeded in ensuring that working-class and black Americans bore the brunt of fighting in Vietnam — Project 100,000 recruits suffered twice the death rate of American troops as a whole.

Feminist critiques synthesized various challenges to the Moynihan Report, pointing out its dehumanizing pathologism, support for patriarchy, and rationalization of race-based economic inequality. In the face of these criticisms, Moynihan moved rightward. By the late 1960s, he became increasingly skeptical of the federal government’s ability to enact social reform.

By the 1970s Moynihan had developed into one of the most prominent members of a powerful group of [neoconservative intellectuals](#) — onetime liberals who rushed to protect the social order against the growth of left-wing social movements such as Black Power and feminism. For neoconservatives, radical criticism of the Moynihan Report indicated the need to defend bedrock American values such as the nuclear-family norm.

But for feminists and their allies, the cocktail of destructive assumptions underlying the Moynihan Report highlighted the importance of challenging gender and racial oppressions simultaneously. As their criticisms of the Moynihan Report suggest, those who challenge inequality today should not limit their ambitions to the faulty aspirations of postwar liberalism.

Puerto Rico- New Party of the Working People Fights Austerity

The Partido del Pueblo Trabajador—the Party of the Working People (PPT)—is a political project of the Puerto Rican left addressed to working people in t
During that period, total employment has fallen by 20 percent or 250,000 jobs. Since 1996 manufacturing employment in particular has fallen by half (from
The fiscal situation is equally dismal. Public debt (including that of the central government and public corporations) stands around \$73 billion and is roughl

A Century of Dependent Development

Many of the features of the present crisis are hardly new but correspond to some of the fundamental aspects of Puerto Rican society under U.S. rule. Sinc
As indicated, a further consequence of the domination of Puerto Rico’s economy by U.S. capital has been, and is, the constant outflow, largely toward the
Not only does mass unemployment result in significant migration, it also depresses wages, which consequently deepens economic inequality and insures
Given this level of poverty, it is not surprising that a considerable number of people participate in one or several federally funded welfare programs. While
Meanwhile, Puerto Rico’s propertied classes have accommodated to whichever sectors and activities have been assigned or left open to them by U.S. cap

Working People’s Agenda: From Discontent to Class Awareness

Yet, while most workers support either statehood or autonomy, many are also increasingly alienated by the policies pursued by both PNP and PPD admin
The fact that the program of the PPT does not favor one or another status option does not make it a “catch-all” party in which “everything goes,” as some c
In the context of the present fiscal emergency, the PPT has formulated a five-point program that includes: auditing and renegotiating the existing debt of th
One could be tempted to summarize the PPT’s perspective with the phrase “from status to class politics.” But this would be a mistake, since the PPT ackn

Some Questions, Problems, and Opportunities

The project of the PPT differs in several regards from past and existing organizations and orientations of the Puerto Rican left. The creation of a party run

The fact is that most of the founders of the PPT are independentistas and socialists. The initial push for the creation of the PPT in 2010 came from the Mo
Does the participation and leading role of independentistas and socialists in a broad party that does not define itself as either one of those constitute an ac
Is this then a renunciation of independence for those of us who defend it? That conclusion would only be warranted if one felt that an increasingly consci
Do independentistas and socialists run the danger of diluting or abandoning their views in the quest for unity on such a basis? Certainly. But we also have
Seeking and gaining ballot status and participating in the 2012 elections enabled the PPT to bring its ideas to a wide public. Since the elections it has rem

Beyond the Ballot Box

The PPT does not underestimate the need for organizing beyond the electoral field. Even if it were to gain office or gather significant electoral support, mo
Furthermore, in the context of the acute economic and fiscal crisis, almost all immediate battles regarding wages, pensions, university fees, minimum-wag
In the present context, no party linked to the working class can simply plan according to the electoral calendar: During 2015 and 2016 events such as pos

Results and Prospects

The PPT ran around ninety candidates in the 2012 elections. Two of its four national candidates and its electoral commissioner were women. It obtained a
After the elections, the PPT adopted three priorities: collecting the 55,000 signatures required to regain ballot status, strengthening the party's organization
Regarding organization and programmatic elaboration, much work remains to be done. The objective of having a group in each municipality is still somew
Given the composition of the Puerto Rican left and labor movement, government employees, teachers, and progressive professionals (labor lawyers, univ
Unlike other parties, the PPT does not hide its present deficiencies. Its program is still an uneven document. Written during 2010 and amended afterward,
The elaboration of a plan of economic reconstruction is a particularly complex and pressing task. Such a plan will surely demand an expansion of the publ
It is in the interest of U.S. working people (including, needless to say, the more than four million Puerto Ricans that reside in the United States) to see that

[New Politics](#)

Mexico- Oaxaca Braces for Conflict

Teachers fight on virtually alone: a militant minority whose interests seem selfish to some and whose tactics seem violent to others. Yet a great many teachers feel they fight not only for themselves, but for their union, their communities, and for Mexican democracy.

Mexican teachers are mobilizing once again —demonstrating by the tens of thousands—this time against anti-union reforms and the militarization of the state of Oaxaca by its governor Gabino Cué Monteagudo from the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Nine years after the 2006 teachers' rebellion, Oaxaca is bracing for another potentially violent conflict.

For the last year, tens of thousands of Mexican teachers have demonstrated, carried out lengthy strikes, seized highway toll booths and government buildings, and clashed with the police and army. These teachers, mainly from the southern and western states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán oppose the 2013 education reform, which grants the government power to evaluate the country's 1.4 million teachers and remove them if they don't pass a standardized test. President Enrique Peña Nieto argues that the reform will improve education for the country's youth, but teachers insist that it is designed to break the union, weaken public education, and destroy what's left of the country's social compact.

The teachers, many of whom are indigenous and bilingual, argue that they have developed an educational model appropriate for the communities, parents, and students they serve. The national test, they argue, will not benefit them or their students. Nor will it benefit their own families: In 1992 Oaxaca's teachers won the right to pass their teaching positions on to family members. Many teachers believe that they should be able to turn their jobs over to their children, but if graduates of other colleges can compete, their children may not get their jobs.

Led by the National Teachers' Coordinating Committee (CNTE), a dissident left-wing caucus of the National Teachers Union (SNTE), teachers have prevented the examinations from taking place in their stronghold states, closing test sites, burning testing materials, and cutting the hair of any teachers who attempt to take the test. When the national elections for Congress, state governors, and mayors took place this past June, teachers called for a boycott, arguing that all the parties were corrupt and anti-union. And in Oaxaca the union went further, closing polling places and burning ballots in the street, coming into conflict with the police and army and sometimes with grassroots community groups that wanted to vote.

Since June Oaxaca has been occupied by thousands of soldiers and police, and only a few days ago it came to light that in late July the governor had officially called upon the federal government to send the Army, Air Force, and Navy to maintain order. Governor Cué has argued that the strength of la CNTE, which has shown that it can put over 80,000 teachers into the streets, makes it impossible for him to govern without the backing of the military.

Oaxaca has been at the heart of the militant teachers movement, and the federal and state governments are determined to break the union's significant power there. Since 1992 when, under teacher pressure, the state created the State Institute of Public Education of Oaxaca (IEEPO), the Oaxaca state government has

been obliged to hire all graduates of the teachers colleges, which are dominated by the same left groups that lead la CNTE.

Local 22 of the Mexican Teachers Union—controlled by the CNTE—has played a large role in IEEPO where its members hold some 300 of the Institute's 4,000 jobs. The government alleges that many teachers collect salaries without ever showing up to teach in a classroom.

Governor Cué and la CNTE have been heading toward confrontation since last month when the governor announced that he was replacing IEEPO with a new structure. He also secretly called upon the federal government to send in the military. The CNTE sought an injunction against the closing of the Institute, but a judge threw the union's request out of court, ruling that the governor's closing of the agency was legal and that the injunction was against the public interest. The CNTE has called for a national strike to coincide with the beginning of the Mexican school year on August 24, but Cué has announced that any teacher who misses three consecutive days will be fired, in accordance with the 2013 Education Reform Law. In a recent development, courts in Oaxaca City have issued arrest warrants on August 19 for 15 teachers who were accused of having destroyed election materials in the June 7 federal elections.

While education reform has been the central issue, teachers in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero, and Michoacán also joined the massive demonstrations following the forcible disappearance of 43 protestors last September 26 in Iguala, Guerrero, most of them students at the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College. Though over 120,000 Mexicans have been killed, 25,000 forcibly disappeared and hundreds of thousands displaced since former President Felipe Calderón began his war on the drug cartels in 2006, it was the forced disappearance of 43 young students that put a human face on the killings that have plagued Mexico. While the core of the teachers' opposition is based in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán, in this latest spate of protests against state repression, teachers in Morelos and Puebla in central Mexico and by others in Chihuahua and Durango in the north also took to the streets.

Marching under the slogan "alive they were taken, alive we want them back," parents of the disappeared college students have mounted what has become an international campaign to find their children. Accounts of the violent events, however, suggest that the police colluded with a criminal gang in the killing of the students and the subsequent burning of their bodies.

Though La CNTE's teachers have shown a remarkable ability over the last 30 years to mobilize tens and even hundreds of thousands of teachers, today they have few allies in the working class. And while the teachers' strikes and militant protests might appear to be the vanguard of a rising, radical worker movement, they may in fact, be the desperate rearguard action of a labor movement in decline.

Ten years ago things were different. Then the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME), an independent union unlike most in Mexico, would have joined teacher protests. But in October 2009 former President Felipe Calderón seized the electrical facilities, liquidated the company, fired 44,000 workers, and eliminated the union. Some 16,000 SME members continue to fight for their jobs, but the union no longer has any economic or political power.

Ten years ago the Miners and Metal Workers (SNTMMRM) might have also offered support, but a 2006 disaster at the Pasta de Conchos mine in the state of Coahuila that killed 65 miners changed that. Union president Napoleon Gómez Urrutia called the tragedy "industrial homicide," blaming the companies and the government for lax enforcement of safety standards. In retaliation, President Felipe Calderón's administration falsely accused Gómez Urrutia of embezzling \$50 million from his union. With the help of the United Steel Workers of Canada and the United States, Gómez Urrutia fled to Vancouver, B.C. to avoid being imprisoned.

With the miners on the defensive, Grupo Mexico, one of the country's largest mining corporations, waged a war against the union and eventually eliminated it from the Cananea mine. While the courts have thrown out all charges against Gómez Urrutia, he has continued to lead the union from Canada, fearing to return to Mexico.

Occasionally some group of workers does decide to fight, but this almost always leads to swift retribution. In March, for example, farmworkers in San Quintín, Baja California struck for higher wages against both their employers and the state-controlled union that represents them. The coalition of indigenous fieldworker organizations shut down the Trans-Peninsular Highway that carries produce from the fields to stores in the United States and paralyzed the agricultural assembly line. President Peña Nieto's government promised investigations but sent the army and police, which successfully broke the strike. Afterwards the companies continued to pay the same low wages.

Most of Mexico's "official unions" do the government's bidding: they prevent strikes, work with the company to eliminate rank-and-file militants, and they keep wages low to attract domestic and foreign investment. Many, run by gangsters and lawyers, are "ghost unions" unknown to their members, while 80% to 90% of all collective bargaining agreements are thought to be "protection contracts" that offer only the legal minimum while allowing employers to say they have a union and a contract in order to keep out independent unions. The most important independent union is the National Union of Workers (UNT) made up largely of the telephone workers and university workers unions and some small federations like the Authentic Labor Front (FAT). But their impact is limited.

So the teachers fight on virtually alone, a militant minority whose interests seem selfish to some and whose tactics seem violent to others. Yet many CNTE teachers are convinced that they fight not only for themselves, but also for their union, their communities, and for the Mexican people at large.

20 August

[North American Congress on Latin America](#)

Sri Lanka- “We must Defeat Mahinda’s fascist politics”

Sri Lanka held parliamentary elections on August 17. The result saw Wickremesinghe’s United National Front for Good Governance (UNFGG), in which his United National Party plays a significant role win 106 seats - an increase of 46 since the 2010 elections - but fail to win a majority. Wickremesinghe was however able to form a government with the support of MPs from the main opposition United People’s Freedom Alliance who are supporters of the President Maithripala Sirisena. This interview with Bahu was conducted by the Lanka Daily Mirror before the elections.

You openly supported President Maithripala Sirisena’s “Yahapalana” plan during the last Presidential election. So why are you hoping to contest independently at the general elections?

Actually all parties which were together during that period against former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and now they were separated out in many ways. Essentially even I am still providing my support to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe with my agreement for “Vipaksha Virodaya” (Against Oppositional Parties). That agreement we had started long time back and I am still with that concord. Even in the last ten years we have been working together but when elections came we have separately represented ourselves.

I am still with Ranil Wickremesinghe on democratic issues and as for an example against dictatorship, against racism, against the repression of homosexuals, against repression of other religions and for rationalist programmes, we are backing him.

So even in the elections I work together with him in that sense. Getting elected is not a problem but we have to have a common campaign and that campaign is obtainable.

What is the most crucial issue for you and your party that needs immediate attention?

The crucial issue is the Fascist movement of Mahinda Rajapaksa. He represents a very repressive movement. Mahinda Rajapaksa was corrupt so in that sense he is Fascist and it goes beyond the country’s rule of law.

He makes use of ethnic campaigns to oppress others. We have to defeat that and that is the first democratic task before us. We are asking people to vote against the Mahinda faction. Even within the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) there was only a fraction that supported him and even the leader of the party opposed Mahinda. But they conspired by all their means and captured a section and we are trying to defeat them, which is our first task, even in this election.

And at the same time we are trying to change the country into a hyper democracy further and we believe Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe’s democracy plan is liberal and is guided by parliamentary democracy and also the Commonwealth criteria.

But we want to go beyond that because we feel that Mahinda Rajapaksa’s fascist faction is in the streets, and is going on in the mass movement. So we have to face it. I would like to give a piece of advice to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe that we must defeat these conspiracies and must show them that we are not sacred.

What is your view about the two main political parties alternatively ruling the country?

The development of the parties has created different factions. If we take the United National Party (UNP) of the early period, during D.S.Senanayake, it was a very conservative party but during Ranil Wickremesinghe’s period it has changed over to a radical party and only a radical party can go and have a peace agreement with LTTE Leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and he signed a peace agreement with him. That was impossible to believe in the UNP even in those days.

So therefore parties have changed. SLFP also have changed.

Over history it has been proved beyond doubt that the majority of voters cast their votes to the two main parties. In this backdrop do you think it is practical for smaller parties to contest?

My purpose is that I have the right to talk and I can meet the general public. If I did not contest I do not have that right. So I am contributing that and it is a massive operation. I am going to see various places, and I am writing articles, I am giving interviews and it is an achievement.

Then secondly I might be able to say things which are not said by the main parties. For example even in the UNP some of the criticism that I am making may not be there. And also I might get some votes and that will be crucial.

In the sense that I could show the others "Look here, we have some votes and so that means some people are listening to us." That could pressurize them and have a mass agitation on the basis of them.

You have been strong on behalf of the minority rights. At this moment there is a debate over the demand by certain Tamil parties for a federal solution for the ethnic issue. What is your view?

The name federal is not important. What is important is how much power they demand. Currently they demand land powers, police powers etc. I should take India as an example; it is not a country that is a federal republic but the States has a set of powers. It is a separate country but it is a Unitary State.

Therefore captivating about federalism is not useful but what is useful is to itemise, what powers we need and do by experiments. How to get our culture, language and our identity reserved and improved and it can be discussed. Taking it as a word which has been debated in the country; "Power sharing", I used the word power sharing and let us talk about the power sharing. We should refer and have an accurate idea of how much we should share and how much power we should possess as a country. -

12 August 2015

Vickramabahu Karunarathne ('Bahu') is the general secretary of the Nava Saja Samana Party (NSSP - New Socialist Party), the Sri Lanka section of the Fourth International.

Sri Lanka- Let us build a Left alternative!

These days the focus of most of the country is on the general election scheduled for 17th August 2015. People want to know how the victory achieved by Maithripala Sirisena after defeating Mahinda Rajapakse in the 8th January 2015 presidential election will be reflected in the representation of the contending political party in the new parliament.

The government formed by former Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) General-Secretary Sirisena with the United National Party (UNP) of Ranil Wickremasinghe is a result of a mass uprising against the racist, dictatorial government of Mahinda Rajapakse. It was a robbery of the wish of the people by one section of capitalists.

The 100 day yahapalana ('good governance') government fulfilled only a very few promises they have agreed. President Sirisena's attempt to get the majority of parliamentarians, from his own party, to vote for the 20th amendment to the Constitution for electoral reform ended in vain. Finally he was compelled to dissolve the parliament without fulfilling many promises including the Right to Information Act; the Audit Act; independent Commissions etc.

The chauvinist forces which were defeated by the non-racist pro-democracy forces on 8th of January raised its head thereafter. They are contesting the general election under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapakse. We can see some elements of the pro-Sirisena campaign, now supporting Rajapakse at this election; while others have left the SLFP to join with the UNP in its United National Front for Good Governance (UNFGG).

The three main forces – the UNP-led United National Front for Good Governance; the SLFP-led United Peoples Freedom Alliance; and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which has received the support of some progressive sections of civil society especially intellectuals and artistes – have put forward their election manifestos to the public. There is not much difference between the UNFGG and UPFA in particular, while the JVP has adapted to capitalism and proclaims itself to be business-friendly.

Ranil Wickremasinghe says he will continue the neo-liberal policies that were followed by Rajapakse in the past 10 years, but efficiently and without corruption. The UNP leader says that development will be based on foreign investments and follow an export-oriented economic policy. The mega-city development projects; establishment of tourist zones; new industries financed by foreign capital; and cluster villages are the centre-piece of Wickremasinghe's policies. The promises made to strengthen democracy and proposals for social welfare are just the icing to camouflage this capitalist economic policy.

Mahinda Rajapakse recycles the same economic policy he implemented in government: infrastructure projects and hand-outs for political patronage. However, to differentiate himself and capture the Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarian vote, he has liberally laced his campaign with racism against an imaginary Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam resurgence and pseudo-patriotism against Western imperialism. Scare-mongering and beating the Sinhala nationalist drum; once more, he promotes himself as the 'King of the Sinhalese'. While president, even while attacking the foreign policy of those countries towards Sri Lanka and cosying up to China and Chinese capital, he faithfully implemented the neoliberal policies of Western imperialism.

The economic, social and political crisis in Sri Lanka does not depend on the personality or incorruptibility of the two contenders for prime minister. It is an unavoidable result of neo-liberalism. In this situation, there is no difference between the UNFGG and the UPFA on economic policies; while on the national question, the JVP also parrots its opposition to state reform and power-sharing with Tamils and other minorities.

In the past, the JVP claimed to be the only genuine force for socialism in Sri Lanka. A new dream has taken hold: to civilise capitalism, through harnessing the market economy to social justice. Under the

leadership of Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the JVP has traded its previous mish-mash of state socialism and Sinhala nationalism, for the capitalist aspirations of the petit-bourgeoisie. The capitalist system will not be challenged, the JVP assures the business community and the elite; but the JVP will clean its muck, in the interests of all classes in society. All should understand that capitalism in the neoliberal epoch cannot be reconciled with social democracy. It cannot be humanised or rehabilitated. Those who talk of such foolish things will end up only serving the capitalist system, as they reward themselves with its spoils.

In this situation, the election on 17th August does not solve the problems of the masses. When the capitalist forces take forward the next phase of neo-liberalism, the class struggle may intensify. We expect further attacks on workers' rights and reduction in real wages in relation to the cost-of-living and inflation. Permanent employment will be replaced with temporary, short-term and precarious work. The income and wealth gap between those at the top of society and the impoverished sections at the bottom. Daily-waged workers, peasants, fisher-folk, small-scale producers and students will be increasingly excluded from the market economy.

Left Voice (Vame Handa) is not contesting in the upcoming election. This is not because we are against elections, even in a contest that is always rigged in favour of the rich and powerful. Under present conditions, the Left does not have the social power to implement an agenda for social transformation. Our left programme is not one that can be taken forward by pressurising capitalist governments. We put it forward it as an agenda for an anti-capitalist Left:

1. Implement an economic policy that breaks with neo-liberalism and stops burdening the poor. Stop taking loans from the international financial institutions and money-markets, increase public welfare, protect small producers, and control the banking and finance system.

2. Introduce reforms to domestic economic policy that strengthen the living standards and capacities of workers, farmers, fishers, and small producers.

3. Create a constituent assembly which comprises representatives of oppressed sections to change the structure of the state completely. Empower the people to call back those elected representatives who work against their wishes. Remove the privileges and perks granted to them.

4. The Tamil-speaking people are entitled to their right to self determination. This decision should be taken by a referendum of the people of the North and East only.

5. There should be genuine devolution of power which fulfils the aspirations of national minorities. We support full-implementation of the 13th Amendment, including police and land powers to the North and East, even while rejecting the current provincial council system as the limit of autonomy rights for the oppressed nationalities.

6. Immediate resettlement of all internally displaced persons, removal of army camps from the North and East, release of political prisoners, justice for the disappeared and those who lost their lives in the war.

7. There are only three parties contesting in this election which share some of the above perspective. They are the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the United Socialist Party (USP). Left Voice has its points of agreement and disagreement in the policies and practices of these groups. However, we appreciate that by contesting the election, they are defending the principle of class independence and raising the profile of the Left. We appeal to you to cast your vote for any one of them. We believe that had these three parties combined in a joint left front, swelled by the support of other radical groups and sections, we could begin to renew the Left and its identity in society.

Iran- The Iran Deal: Up, Down or Sideways?

Even while the rhetoric around the P5+1 nuclear deal with Iran seems to be reaching reactor-grade "critical" level, signs are emerging that the fix just may be quietly in. [1]

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, after lining up his entire 54-member majority to vote down the agreement, states that it's "quite likely" that the presidential veto of the disapproval resolution will be upheld. This is the man, remember, who once announced that his political agenda revolved around "making Barack Obama a one-term President." Now it's as if he's pleading with the Democrats: It's up to you to round up 34 of your Senators to uphold the veto and keep us from all going over the cliff.

A sophisticated Israeli analyst, Uri Savir, writes that it's time for Tel Aviv to give up on blowing up the deal and develop new security understandings with regional Arab states ("Rethinking the Middle East's Nuclear Balance," al-Monitor.com, posted August 16). And when the founding president of United Against Nuclear Iran, nuclear weapons expert Gary Samore, resigns with a statement that he finds the deal better than anyone could have expected, it looks like rational thinking may be blowing in the wind.

Then again, this is America, the land of the Crack Brothers and AIPAC and Sheldon Adelson and 17 Republican presidential candidates in an election that's only 14 months away – one Super Bowl, one NBA Finals and two World Series from now.

Let's try to unpack the real from the rhetorical and the ridiculous in the raging political fight around the agreement. In particular, what are its loudest opponents actually defending?

What the Deal Does

As suggested above, the deal to drastically reduce Iran's nuclear development programs and remove sanctions reflects "rational thinking" among all the parties. That's not quite the same thing as "progressive thinking," even though every liberal and progressive-leaning force in the land is understandably throwing itself into lobbying Congressional Democrats to uphold it.

This is a deal among four imperialist states – the United States, Britain, France and Germany; two emerging or aspiring ones, Russia and China (depending on your definition of imperialism); and Iran, ruled by a theocratic-military partnership. It reflects a convergence of interests among the dominant elites and ruling classes of these states, amidst all their other conflicts and brutalities, recognizing that this deal is better than the alternative of sliding toward a U.S.-Iran war.

Underlying the agreement is the emergence of a new Middle East reality. If this language seems detached and bloodless, let's never forget all the immediate horrors of the region. These are the lands of the Syrian regime's hundred Guernicas, of the genocidal and mass rape cult called the "Islamic State," of Yemen's state meltdown and mass child starvation, the crushing of Egypt's democracy and the hopes of the Arab Spring, of U.S. drone strikes and bombings that rarely fail to make the most appalling situations even worse, of refugees fleeing by the millions for dubious safety on European shores.

The agreement with Iran solves none of these, nor does it bring justice for the Palestinian people any closer, or any promise for internal reforms in Iran or anywhere else, let alone a nuclear-free Middle East – although to be sure, defeating it would surely make the regional wars, the repression in Iran and the danger of nuclear weapons proliferation much worse. What then does it actually mean, and what's at stake in the political war around it?

1) The P5+1 deal with Iran at bottom reflects an emerging U.S.-led strategy – which Russia and China would also see in their state interests – to "stabilize" the mess that imperialism created in the Middle East. The big change: Israel will be an important but no longer the absolutely primary U.S. strategic ally. Instead, it's now necessary to develop a multilateral set of tactical and strategic balances that will include Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt, along with Israel as first-but-not-only partner.

2) The essence of the fight is that "pro-Israel" hawks reject this multilateral strategy and insist on maintaining Israel-uber-alles. It's not about an Iranian military threat to Israel, which is nonexistent regardless of Iran's nuclear status. (If anything, it's the Saudis who have more serious real concerns about Iran.) Iran's nuclear weapons contingency plan was developed against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, which invaded Iran with U.S. encouragement in the 1980s. Tehran was prepared for a grand bargain with the United States after the U.S. invasion toppled Saddam in 2003 – an opening that the Cheney-Bush gang arrogantly refused.

Senator Charles Schumer's statement of opposition to the deal is revealing in this regard. Obviously, his pledge not "to be affected by politics or party" was never to be taken seriously. Further, he's certainly smart enough to know that the Iranian mullahs' "Death to the Zionist entity" rallies – which draw visibly dwindling crowds of Iranians – are "for the goyim" (i.e. for the entertainment of the foolish and ignorant). Interestingly, Schumer concedes that the deal is acceptable in its early stages, but problematic down the road – a concession that Netanyahu's comical "weeks or months to the Iranian bomb" is drivel. It's the future, in which Israel's demands on the U.S. may no longer reign unquestionably supreme above other considerations, where his problem lies.

3) For the dead-end neoconservatives who supply the ideology for the AIPAC wing of the Israel Lobby, and for the entrenched bureaucracies of major U.S. Jewish organizations, the main threat is the diminution of their own power in the new Middle East policy dispensation. Ever since 1967, a cohort of intellectuals attaching themselves to the project of American power ruling the world – many but by no means all Jewish, and many but not all ex-liberals – have derived considerable influence as bridges between U.S. and Israeli military, political and economic power elites.

It's not Israel's existence that's at stake here – the threat to its future lies in its own internal rapidly deteriorating politics and creeping social disaster, but that's another whole story. The fury of AIPAC and allied organizations is a rearguard defense of themselves, their unparalleled access to the halls of power and their capacity to bully and intimidate dissident politicians. That helps explain why they are doubling down on trying to kill the Iran deal – even when Jewish Americans favor the deal in higher proportions than the overall U.S. population.

What if it Fails?

4) In view of the consequences of a congressional overturn of the agreement (a 2/3 veto override in both House and Senate), such an outcome seems almost unthinkable. Presumably, votes are being carefully calculated to allow some Democrats to vote against it without actually killing the deal. I think it can also be predicted that if the deal is upheld, the Republican candidates' current pronouncements that they'd cancel it are the hot air of August before the primaries. But we do need to think about what a rejection would mean.

5) An overturn of the deal by Congress would obviously cripple this administration's foreign policy for the rest of its term, and possibly the next one. It might conceivably wreck the final Trans Pacific Partnership negotiations, where the U.S. is going up against all the other TPP countries in its crusade to protect the monopoly super-profits of Big Pharma. A president desperately trying to save his remaining "legacy" deal will not be in a strong position to arm-wrestle the rest of the world.

As Obama and Kerry are warning, most likely the Russians, Chinese and ultimately Europeans would walk away from the global sanctions on Iran – whether overtly or unofficially. Why bother with a U.S. administration that couldn't even get support from one-third of its Congress?

6) The enormous reservoir of popular pro-U.S. feeling in Iran would take a huge hit. Iranian "hardliners," mainly the Revolutionary Guard elements who control much of the economy and have become rich because of the sanctions, would rejoice. It might be effectively curtains for Rouhani's presidency.

7) The defeat of the Iran deal would hugely expand the already significant split in the U.S. Jewish community. Furthermore, while the power of the Israel Lobby in U.S. politics would be enhanced at least in the short term, the global picture would be quite different. The raging opponents of the agreement can't all be stupid enough (though some surely are) to fail to recognize this: Internationally, this could be Israel's all-time biggest political disaster.

The crippling of U.S. Middle East policy would entail huge damage to its capacity and perhaps willingness to continue defending Israel's outrageous actions in Palestine. There would likely be a vast mushrooming of BDS globally, including possible European sanctions against Israeli banks that are already threatened. How much of its remaining credibility would the Obama administration want to expend in protecting Israel from the consequences of wrecking such a strategically critical deal?

What Will Netanyahu Do?

8) How the Israeli government might respond to a defeat, or the more likely near-defeat of the agreement – what Netanyahu calls "resounding moral majority" against it – is speculative and as always dependent on internal political considerations. What's certain is that Israel will demand even more U.S. military aid, and almost surely get it as a consolation prize (and a way for Obama to buy a few Congressional votes).

A unilateral military attack on Iran is out of the question – Israeli generals know it's crazy – but there might be the possibility (for example) of resuming Israeli assassinations of Iranian scientists as a provocation, in the hopes of getting an Iranian retaliation that would give Israel a pretext for escalation.

If Netanyahu wants to go for some kind of new war (in Gaza or Lebanon or whatever), I assume he couldn't really do it from his current tiny majority with barely 61 Knesset seats, but would need to bring in either the "Zionist Union" (Herzog) or the fascist Avigdor Lieberman into his coalition – or both. Just in case anyone had illusions about Herzog representing a positive alternative, he's openly and literally embraced Netanyahu in condemning the deal.

9) One must wonder if the Republicans and AIPAC really want to "win" this fight, aside from those for whom destroying Obama supersedes any other goal. With the Middle East already in flames with so many victims trying to escape, this president's chances (and probably the next one's) of pulling off any measure of political-military success in Iraq or Syria – which depend on at least tactical cooperation with Iran and coordination with Russia – would be almost nil. Is this what the Republican candidates seriously want to inherit? Do even the craziest-talking among them want to be taking on Iran, ISIS and maybe the Syrian regime at the same time, with no allies?

As Uri Savir reports "a senior member of AIPAC's political leadership" saying on condition of anonymity: "We have decided to go all-out on the issue, despite this being a partisan cause...Secretly, some of us pray not to succeed in this battle." ("AIPAC Chooses Sides: Picks Bibi Over Own Supporters, U.S. Jews," al-Monitor.com, posted August 2, 2015)

In short, for so many reasons it's hard to contemplate an actual 2/3 congressional vote to kill the deal. It's just that in this crazy-ass country, you can never know for sure.

August 25

Iraq- Iraq, winds of hope

Since the end of July, and despite continued terrorist attacks by the so called Islamic State (IS) against Iraqi civilians, massive popular demonstrations have taken place in the capital Baghdad and several cities in the south of the country, [1] mainly to denounce corruption in the country and the political bankruptcy of the ruling sectarian political parties. Demands of the protesters notably included the dissolution of parliament, the end of the domination of the clergy on the structure of the Iraqi state and the modification of the Constitution to end the sectarian quotas. The demonstrations also condemned the continuing failures and power outages, deteriorating public services and increasing social inequalities.

The underlying causes of this widespread anger, whose sources are much deeper, are above all the growing authoritarianism and lack of social justice, with over 35% of Iraqis living below the poverty line. Furthermore, the repression by the security services and Shia reactionary militias linked to the government, of a protest demanding the provision of electricity in an area located at the north of the city of Basra, causing the death of a protester and leaving 4 wounded, has also ignited the spark of protest.

Even if conservative parties allied with the government and religious figures called to participate in the massive protests in an opportunistic attempt and to coax the movement, while without mobilising their membership, the demonstrators, for the most part made up of youth and with a substantial female presence, were challenging the political system as a whole ...

These massive demonstrations calls for a secular state in opposition to a confessional state, against the division between Sunni and Shi'a populations, for women's rights and equality, and clear condemnations of sectarian political parties with placards notably saying "the parliament and the Islamic State are two sides of the same coin", "Daech was born out of your corruption", "the Human does not survive with religion but bread and dignity", "in the name of religion, they act like thieves", "no to sectarianism, no to nationalism yes to humanity", "there is no end to corruption in a sectarian and nationalist regime", etc ...

Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, whose eight years, from 2006 until 2014, in office were marred by allegations of corruption, authoritarianism and alienation of the Sunni population and who still has an important influence in the Iraqi regime, especially in the security services and various Shi'a sectarian militias, was particularly targeted by protesters who chanted slogans demanding that he'd be tried for his crimes and corruption cases. An Iraqi parliamentary inquiry has also found former prime minister Al-Maliki and 35 other officials responsible for the fall of Iraq's second city, Mosul, which fell smoothly into the hands of the IS in June 2014. He was notably accused as commander in chief of the army, to have sought to centralize control of the army in its services and to have played an important part in the weakening of the army particularly in appointing commanders chosen for their loyalty rather than their competences.

Militia groups linked to the former Prime Minister and / or to the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) have not actually hesitated to attack protesters with knives in cities such as Baghdad and Kerbala, while the local security forces remained silent, resulting notably with more than thirty wounded in Baghdad and including dozens in Karbala.

In addition to this, a large crowd in the city of Kerbala, a highly symbolic Shi'a location, has also not hesitated to condemn the hegemonic influence of Iran on the Iraqi government and its interventions in the internal affairs of the country singing "Karbala is free, Tehran out! Out!" after Shi'a sectarian militia groups, called "popular mobilization forces" trained and organized by the Iraqi regime with the direct assistance of military officials of the IRI to fight the Islamic State, and Shi'a clergymen chanted slogans glorifying the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The militias then attacked the demonstrators.

Few days later, still in the city of Kerbala, the demonstrators tried to storm the building of the province and local government, but security forces repelled them.

This massive popular movement was also accompanied by strikes in some sectors, particularly in the energy and industry fields, opposing privatization and for better working conditions.

The Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, from the Shi'a Dawa Islamic fundamentalist movement, reacted to these protesters by voting new laws against corruption and suppressing important political positions (notably of three deputy prime ministers and three vice-presidents, including Nouri al-Maliki) and privileges of ministers and deputies to try to stop this movement. The program proposed by the Parliament also addressed the "immediate and comprehensive reduction" of the large number of bodyguards of officials, the abolition of "special provisions" granted to officials and finally the abolition "of sectarian quotas». The plan proposes that politicians are no longer selected according to their religious or ethnic affiliation, but according to "their competences, honesty and experience" .

These measures are nevertheless probably only propagandist and a way to calm the rising wrath of the Iraqi popular classes, because the main beneficiaries of the sectarian regime are these same deputies that voted these law.

We must show our solidarity with the Iraqi popular masses, who have suffered of local oppressions, from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein to the sectarian and reactionary parties in power since 2005, in addition to the IS, and of the interventions of regional, the IRI and the Gulf monarchies and international imperialists actors, especially of the USA since the embargo in 1991 to the military intervention and occupation from 2003, in their struggle for democracy, social justice, equality and against sectarianism.

The massive popular protests in Iraq are a sign of hope in a region dominated and crushed by bloody dictatorships and reactionary forces.

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India- Corruptions, Scandals and the Charade of Indian Parliamentary Politics

Recent events in the monsoon parliament session gives lie to the charade of the political democracy in India. Slogans and stunts from the opposition parties have been raining, demanding resignation of the External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan, and Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje Scindia for their involvement in corruption scams. Sushma Swaraj purportedly acted in a 'humanitarian' interest to help Lalit Modi. All this seems straight out of a comedy skit, but the tragic part is, this is the reality of Indian politics.

The Congress (and some other parties), creating hullabaloo with their demands of investigation into the charges of corruption, and resignations of the people named in them, is itself mired in a number of scams involving crores of rupees. How credible is it going to be to the masses, if Congress raises its voice against corruption and scams?

It needs to be acknowledged that corruption is a real issue that plagues the country, and there is real anger and frustration amongst people concerning the issue. Looking at the meteoric rise of AAP, it should not be hard for us to discern that anyone who tries to tap in to people's issues, albeit in a populist fashion, will have real purchase amongst the electorate, because the traditional left has ceded space to the right wing parties, by being in alliance with capitalist parties and embracing neoliberal policies wherever they have been in power.

But, we should never lose sight of the fact that the real problems facing Indian society is not corruption or scams—they are symptoms of larger underlying structural issues endemic to capitalism. Congress and BJP have more in common when it comes to corruption, scams or economic policies, than one is led to believe from the acrimonious proceedings in the parliament session. When welfare and social security schemes are cut, farmer's debt are not pardoned, and indirect taxes hitting the toiling masses far more than the super rich are introduced or raised from their present levels to meet up the budget deficit; capitalists like Adani get loans from nationalised banks to the tune of 5,000 crore, and labour laws to land acquisition laws are all changed to suit the needs of the richest of the rich, all these parties play the same role when in power. In other words, there are battles among the political elite for spoils of the loaves and fishes, but they are united in their basic duty to the ruling class, in exploiting and assisting in the exploitation of the toilers.

Corruption is no more an aberration but an inseparable rule of the game, where swindling of thousands of crores is in the offing every season. May, it be self-styled cricket tournaments like IPL, violation of tender rules by the BJP-Shiv Sena government in Maharashtra, allocation of natural resources like coal, allocating telecom bandwidth, no avenues are wasted in this game of profit. Here, Lalit Modi and Rajeev Shukla, both former IPL chairman's embezzle money and undue favours and reprieves from governments, establish the clique. Meanwhile, the governments in power try to settle scores with activists like Teesta Setalvad aiding Gujarat pogrom victims get justice, unduly implicating them for receiving foreign funds for running their organisations. Repression is unleashed with sinister motives to muzzle any dissent against the central government.

Revolutionaries fight for every legitimate reform. We welcome real struggles against corruption and scams. But we should not be blind or overlook the spurious nature of such endeavours of the capitalist parties. As the TMC has shown in Parliament, well aware of its own precarious position over the Saradha Scam, its MPs will "agitate" with the other opposition parties, but will not demand resignations, for that demand can come home to roost in West Bengal as well. We therefore cannot present before people the issue as if fighting corruption is in itself enough. For example, we cannot fight merely against corruption in BPL cards, we need to demand the restoration of the full Public Distribution System. When we look at repeated corruption scandals in the finance market, from the 1980s to the present, we need to make toiling people aware that this is also a way in which capital accumulation occurs in the less developed world.

Not only do we demand the resignation of the ruling corrupt ministers, and due punishment to the perpetrators who have embezzled crores of money; we demand the same of the corrupt politicians who today are in the opposition. We stress the need to build working class struggles with a rainbow of worker's collective, peasants' union, oppressed castes, and gender against the depredations of capitalism which exploit the toiling masses. Corruption is all but a symptom of the capitalist society we live in, and breaking the hegemony of capitalism and replacing it with a just and humane order free of any form of exploitation can only be a viable alternative.

India- To kill or not to kill—a twisted test of nationalism

"There is no justice in killing in the name of justice." – Archbishop Desmond Tutu

The last week of July 2015 presented two tests of nationalism before Indians. The first was whether one mourned the passing away of former President APJ Abdul Kalam Azad, also known as the 'Missile Man' of

India; the other was cheering for putting to death Yakub Memon, who was convicted and executed in relation to the Bombay blasts in 1993.

In the case of Abdul Kalam, no arguments—however painstakingly made—that one who opposed hyper-militarism and came from an anti-war perspective need not consider Kalam a hero, were accepted. These arguments were quickly labelled naïve and unbecoming of the realities of the 21st century. Others, equally naïve, were preparing to commemorate 70 years of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Any arguments questioning the competence of Kalam as an engineer (he was not a scientist) [1], or the cynical nature of his political appointment in the wake of the 2002 Gujarat riots [2], when the BJP was in need of a Muslim face, who was ‘steeped in Hindu culture, [3]’ were met with charges of being anti-national.

Even though met with resistance, criticism of Kalam upon his death was still permissible; but not participating in the celebrations of the execution of Yakub Memon was considered beyond the pale. BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj, who is facing multiple charges of murder, rape and gang rape (with his two nephews), said that “[s]edition charges should be slapped against people sympathising with Yakub Memon and those who have no faith in the Indian Constitution should go to Pakistan. [4]” Yakub Memon was found guilty of conspiracy in the Bombay blasts of 1993, which killed 257 people, convicted and hanged to death in the early hours of July 30, 2015, which by a tragic coincidence also happened to be his birthday. The prime accused in the case—Tiger Memon, Yakub’s brother, and Dawood Ibrahim—are both absconding.

On display was a degrading spectacle of goading in front of television cameras, discussing the macabre details of the length of the rope that would hang Yakub, how and when he would be handed the Quran, when he would be given new clothes, what breakfast will be offered, and in one case “an officer who had been on the investigating team of the 26/11 attacks, excitedly showed how Yakub’s hands would be tied at the back when he takes his last walk—from his cell to the phansi yard. [5]” These are the same people who are appalled at the barbarity of the Saudi Arabian state’s violent form of punishments, and loathe, rightfully, the practices of the Islamic State. Noting on the inhuman barbarity and immorality of death penalty, Albert Camus wrote:

“But what then is capital punishment but the most premeditated of murders, to which no criminal’s deed, however calculated it may be, can be compared? For there to be equivalence, the death penalty would have to punish a criminal who had warned his victim of the date at which he would inflict a horrible death on him and who, from that moment onward, had confined him at his mercy for months. Such a monster is not encountered in private life.”

Hundreds, according to some reports nearly 8000 Muslim, mourned the death of Yakub Memon. According to an Indian Express report dated July 31, 2015, Mushtaq Phoolwala, the lone florist inside Bada Qabristan said that “I’ve worked here for 30 years. Aisa manzar pehle nahin dekha (never seen such a sight before). [6]” However, none of this was reported, as Sanjay Barkund, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations), issued a 13-hour gag order to the media prohibiting “photographing and videographing the funeral procession and the last rites of [the] hanged convict. [7]” In an intensely militarised atmosphere, with the presence of about “1,000 policemen, 125 Rapid Action Personnel (RAF) and riot control police,” family members and others who mourned were disallowed to see Yakub’s face, for one last time, citing concerns of law and order problems [8]. Tripura Governor Tathagata Roy tweeted that those who visited the funeral of Yakub Memon were potential terrorists. He defended his tweets and dismissed those who alleged his remarks reeked of communalism. Hours later, he tweeted: “An explosion of tweets on a hanged terrorist almost made me forget the most important tweet: GURU PURNIMA GREETINGS to all. [9]”

Amidst the sickening display of blood lust for a man helplessly captive in jail, it was heartening to see that quite a few Indians voicing their concern against a culture of violence, and opposing death penalty in general. Aakar Patel, Executive Director, Amnesty International India said “[t]his morning, the Indian government essentially killed a man in cold blood to show that killing is wrong.” In a July 30, 2015, report titled Execution of Yakub Memon cruel and inhuman, Amnesty International went on to observe:

“The use of the death penalty in India has been repeatedly acknowledged by Indian courts to be arbitrary and inconsistent. There exists no credible evidence that the threat of execution is more of a deterrent to crime than a prison sentence. This fact has been confirmed in multiple studies carried out by the UN and in many regions around the world.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception, regardless of the nature or circumstances of the crime; guilt, innocence or other characteristics of the individual; or the method used by the state to carry out the execution. It opposes it as a violation of the right to life as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. [10]”

Many eminent personalities, including retired judges of Supreme Court and various High Courts signed a petition to stall the hanging of Yakub Memon, including but not limited to “Justice Panachand Jain (Retd), Justice H.S. Bedi (Retd), Justice P. B. Sawant (Retd), Justice H. Suresh (Retd), Justice K. P. Siva Subramaniam (Retd), Justice S. N. Bhargava (Retd), Justice K Chandru (Retd), Justice Nagmohan Das (Retd). Retired judges of the Supreme Court of India like Markandey Katju went on to say Yakub Memon’s hanging would

be a gross travesty of justice. [11]" Professor Anup Surendranath, faculty at National Law University, Delhi (NLUD), and Director of Death Penalty Research Project, resigned from the post of Deputy Registrar (Research) in the Supreme Court of India. Such instances of protest from jurists and eminent individuals amongst a general atmosphere of call for violent retribution have reignited the question whether capital punishment is a legitimate form of punishment in liberal society.

The case against Yakub

Since the current discussion has been initiated around Yakub Memon's involvement in the Bombay blasts, let us examine some of the facts of the case. Some people have claimed that Yakub Memon got a fair trial and all legal avenues were exhausted, and in fact they claim that the Supreme Court has shown unprecedented leniency in Yakub's case—as an example they cite the late night hearing of the mercy petition by panel of Supreme Court judges at the CJI's house. As Manisha Sethi, faculty at Jamia Millia Islamia, points out "there was nothing unprecedented about a late night sitting of the Supreme Court. In 2014, Chief Justice HL Dattu stayed Surinder Koli's imminent hanging through a late night order after his lawyers woke him up at 1 am," and "... Yakub's death warrant was issued before he had exhausted his legal rights—a clear violation of the 'procedure established by law' to precede a death sentence; [12]" while senior lawyer Prashant Bhushan said that "[y]esterday the issue was of giving 14 days time, as per a Supreme court judgement, so that he can challenge the dismissal of his mercy petition in court and that he can settle his worldly affairs. But it (mercy petition) was dismissed late last night. No time was given to him. What was this unseemly hurry? What was the need for us to be so bloodthirsty?"

The charge brought against Yakub was that of conspiracy. Nowhere under the law does anyone deserve a death penalty for conspiracy. In this case he was guilty by association—he being the brother of the prime accused Tiger Memon. He was found guilty of transferring money and handling hawala transactions for Tiger Memon, a contemptible crime deserving of punishment for sure. But, the law is clear on the point, that one does not get a death penalty for conspiracy. As N. K. Bhupesh in a Tehelka article points out: "Now, compare this with how the law of the land was applied in the case of Mahatma Gandhi assassination case in which only Nathuram Godse and Narayan Apte — two of the eight murder convicts — were hanged. "The others were not given the death penalty because they did not take part directly in the murder but only assisted in it." But, that consideration was extended neither to Afzal nor to Yakub. [13]" Hence, while the real perpetrators Tiger Memon and Dawood Ibrahim remain absconders, Tiger Memon's brother is made a scape goat, and had to pay with his life.

There is no direct evidence against Yakub Memon. The only evidence is the statement of an approver and confessional statements of a co-accused made to the police, which was later retracted. Former Supreme Court judge Justice (Retd) Markandey Katju upon studying the Supreme Court judgement said that the evidence is "very weak." He observed that "[t]his evidence is retracted confession of the co-accused and alleged recoveries," and added that "everyone knows how confessions are obtained by the police in our country by torture." Prashant Bhushan said that a case mounted solely on the basis of confessional statement would not be admissible under normal law, but can only happen under TADA, which brings me to my next point.

Yakub Memon was tried, and convicted under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, also known as TADA, a draconian law which was later scrapped for its misuse. As Manisha Sethi argues eloquently:

"Its appeal lay in its usefulness as a tool to quell dissent, suppress movements and torment minorities—all through a law legislated by the Parliament and sanctioned by the Supreme Court. By 1995, TADA had been in operation for over a decade. A mountain of evidence pointed to its inherent abuse and lawlessness. Its various sections enabled the police to detain suspects for long periods of time without charging them; simple suspicion became grounds for arrest, confessions before police became admissible – in contravention to the established law of evidence, which protects an accused from incriminating himself—and prosecution could produce secret witnesses against the accused. In early 1995, the incumbent Chairperson of the NHRC, Justice Ranganath Mishra, made an appeal to Parliamentarians to not renew the law, dubbing it "draconian in effect and character" and "incompatible with our cultural traditions, legal history and treaty obligations". ...

But it was TADA's partisanship that was its most striking feature. It was invoked against striking workers and trade unionists in Gujarat, against Dalit landless labourers and Communist activists in Bihar (but never against upper caste private militias), against Muslims accused of perpetrating bomb blasts in Mumbai (though of course not against those who killed, looted and terrorized Muslims in the ghoulish violence that preceded the blasts). In 1994, the National Commission for Minorities documented that 409 out of the 432 arrested under TADA in Rajasthan belonged to minority groups. In Punjab, thousands of Sikhs were rounded up, detained, incarcerated for years. [14]"

The Supreme Court should definitely have taken into consideration mitigating circumstances associated with Yakub Memon's trial. There seems to be some debate as to whether he was actually arrested in Kathmandu or New Delhi, and whether a deal was actually struck by the CBI and Indian officials with Yakub, a speculation which gained currency after the posthumous publication of an article by B. Raman, who was a R&AW official. Even without discussing all these details, what can be said with absolute certainty is that the information

provided by Yakub Memon built a water tight case of Pakistan government's complicity in the Bombay blasts. Yakub came back from Pakistan—and also made sure eight other family members of the Memon family came back to India—and provided Indian officials with very valuable information about Tiger Memon, Taufiq Jaliawala and other ISI operatives and their direct involvement in the bomb blasts. While he was in Pakistan, Yakub started making audio and video recordings, with the intention of turning it over to Indian officials, which he eventually did. He provided three audio cassettes, recording conversations of Tiger Memon, Taufiq Jaliawala and other ISI persons involved in the blast. He provided Indian authorities with videos of bungalows of Dawood Ibrahim, Taufiq Jaliawala and Tiger Memon.

In view of the facts that a person who has provided crucial information on the involvement of the principal accused in the blast; direct complicity of the Pakistan government; against whom there is no direct evidence except confessional statements, some retracted; and who is tried and convicted in accordance to a law which the country has long scrapped deciding it to be draconian, the judgement of capital punishment seems exceedingly harsh and immoral. Even if one were to accept the premise that there are some criminals who deserve to be given capital punishment, Yakub Memon seems not to fit the bill.

Killing as Justice?

But, as I have indicated before, I am opposed to capital punishment in general. I will try to go over some of the most salient points on capital punishment.

- The most common argument put forward in favour of capital punishment says that it provides a deterrence. Leaving aside the point of how morally abhorrent the practice is, there is absolutely no evidence to buttress this claim in the first place. As Shashi Tharoor correctly points out (since we know he is not always right):

"The overwhelming evidence suggests that the death penalty cannot be justified as an effective instrument of the state. Look at the numbers: there's no statistical correlation between applying the death penalty and preventing murder. About 10 people were executed from 1980 to 1990 for the offence of murder under section 302 of the India Penal Code, but the incidence of murder increased from 22,149 to 35,045 during the same period. Similarly, during 1990-2000, even though about 8 people were executed, the incidence of murder increased from 35,045 to 37,399. However, during 2000-2010, only one person was executed and the incidence of murder decreased from 37,399 in 2000 to 33,335 in 2010. No correlation: QED. [15]"

More than 100 countries have abolished capital punishment. The universal declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly considers right to life a most fundamental of human rights, and hence considers capital punishment one of its worst violations.

- The power to put someone to death at the hands of the state is dangerous. The state and all its institutions reflect the biases and prejudices of the society we live in. Thus, the clause that an incident which is deemed to be the 'rarest of the rare' are eligible for capital punishment, makes it vulnerable to misuse because of prevailing prejudices of society which even the best amongst us are not immune to. No wonder research shows that it is the marginalised and the most vulnerable in our society who are at the receiving end of the death penalty. As N. K. Bhupesh observes:

"A recent report of the Death Penalty Research Project of the National Law University, New Delhi (NLUD), reveals that most of the death-row convicts are from the underprivileged sections of society and raises serious questions on the criteria courts adopt to classify certain cases as "rarest of rare".

The NLUD report was not the first to make such an assertion about how the death penalty is given almost exclusively to people from the minorities, exploited castes and oppressed castes. Human rights activists have long maintained that political, religious and ethnic prejudice play a part in adjudication and sentencing. To drive home the point, late human rights activist KG Kannabiran cited the case of two Dalit peasants, Kishta Goud and Bhoomaiah, who were hanged during the Emergency. That was a time when militant agrarian struggles were raging in different parts of the country, including Andhra Pradesh, against the atrocities committed by feudal landlords and peasants, most of them landless, were demanding the constitutional promise of "land to the tiller" to be implemented. Kishta and Bhoomaiah were accused of killing a landlord and sentenced to death. ...

Looking at the profile of Indian citizens hanged since then, Anup Surendranath of NLUD, who has done extensive research on death-row convicts, tells Tehelka that the death penalty is not imposed as a deterrent but to send a political message. Every execution reassures the State of its absolute power over citizens. Surendranath argues that if the death penalty was meant to be a deterrent, then most of those on death row would have been from the zones of conflict across the land. But that, he points out, is not the case because "in the conflict zones, the State doesn't have the patience to go through the judicial process". "There, extrajudicial murder is clearly the most favoured form of execution," he says."

- What if there are mistakes made? Surely no one thinks that our judicial process is immune to human error. But capital punishment is irreversible. The principle that "it is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer" cannot be safe guarded with capital punishment in vogue. Consider the death penalty of Dhananjay Chatterjee, accused of sexually assaulting and brutally murdering 18 year old Hetal Parekh, who was executed on August 14, 2004. A People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) report reads:

“Almost 11 years later to date, a report released by two scholars of Indian Statistical Institute (Kolkata) exposing the shoddy and biased investigation and trial, provides evidence that points towards his innocence and wrongful execution. According to the report by DebashishSengupta and Prabal Chaudhury titled "Re-Analysis of the case of the murder of Hetal Parekh: And the Judicial Killing of Dhananjay Chatterjee" all the mainstays of the police and prosecution’s story are open to question ...

The report makes clear that Dhananjay Chatterjee is only the latest addition in the list of wrongful executions in India. In 2012, 14 eminent jurists including Justice PB Sawant, Justices A P Shah, B A Khan, B H Marlapalle, B G Kolse-Patil, Hosbet Suresh, PrabhaSridevan, K P Sivasubramaniam, RS Verma, and P C Jain had appealed for the commutation of death penalty in separate letters to the President in the cases of 13 persons on death row who they claimed were erroneously sentenced to death. They specifically drew attention to the grave miscarriage of justice in the case of Ravji Ram and Surja Ram who were hanged in the late 1990s and who according to the Supreme Court’s own acknowledgement were wrongly executed.

While the possibility of miscarriage of justice is ever-present and no form of punishment is reversible, the death penalty forecloses any possibility of reversal. [16]”

• Last, but not least, is the moral argument. There is absolutely no justification to kill a person in captivity. I am no pacifist. I affirm the right of the oppressed to struggle and fight for their emancipation—to quote Malcom X—“by any means necessary.” But, killing a person, however wicked, proven guilty beyond any doubt, serves no purpose. It is not a reflection of justice delivered, but that of the society that carries out such a horror.

Why did this happen to Yakub?

Why then did the Indian judiciary carry out this murder state-sponsored murder? Many say it is for justice, for closure of the victims of the Bombay blasts. Really? The Srikrishna Commission report—comprising of 15,000 pages, containing depositions of more than 500 witnesses, and taking on record more than 2900 exhibits—provides details of the violence inflicted by Hindu fanatics, led by Shiv Sena, on the Muslim community, and provides evidence of police complicity in the violence. It claims that “[o]ne common link between the riots of December 1992 and January 1993 and bomb blasts of 12 March 1993 appear to be that the former appear to have been a causative factor for the latter. There does appear to be a cause and effect relationship between the two riots and the serial bomb blasts.”

The Srikrishna Commission reports that mahaarti ritual held from December 26, 1992, “ostensibly to protest the namaz on the streets and the calling of azaans from mosques.” “Some of the mahaartis were later used as occasions for delivering communally inciting speeches; and the crowds dispersing from the mahaarti indulged in damage, looting and arson of Muslim establishments ... [17]” R. Padmanabhan in a Frontline article extensively quotes from the Srikrishna Commission:

““From January 8, 1993 at least, there is no doubt that the Shiv Sena and Shiv Sainiks took the lead in organising violent attacks on Muslims and their properties under the guidance of several leaders... from the level of shakhapramukh to... Bal Thackeray, who, like a veteran general, commanded... Shiv Sainiks to retaliate by organised attacks against Muslims.” Statements and acts of Sena leaders and Thackeray’s writings and directives meanwhile kept building up communal tension, says the Commission. “The... rioting triggered off by the Shiv Sena was hijacked by local criminal elements, who saw... an opportunity to make quick gains. By the time the Shiv Sena realised that enough had been done by way of ‘retaliation,’ the... violence was beyond the control of its leaders...”

Just to give an example of one horrible incident: “On 12th January 1993, a Hindu mob surrounds, strips and assaults two Muslim women. The older woman manages to run away. The uncle of the younger woman, who comes to rescue the young girl of 19, and that girl are beaten and burnt alive by the violent mob. The names of the miscreants are disclosed to the police by a Hindu lady in the locality. Though the miscreants were arrested and tried, they were all acquitted.[18]”

With clear evidence that Shiv Sena leaders were stoking communal violence, police and authorities made no endeavours to stop them, and made claims that any effort to stop them would result in a backlash and worsening of the law and order situation; which further increased the violence incitement from the leaders, now that they had proof that their actions will go with impunity. The commission provides painstaking evidence of the complicity of 26 police stations in the violence. A report published by The Citizen claims that:

“The evidence collected was traumatic, recording instances of Shiv Sainiks and the Mumbai police going into houses and killing innocent inhabitants. Asked by the interviewer about the then well known Hari Masjid incident, Justice Srikrishna said that prima facie evidence established that the police had entered the mosque and opened fire on the unsuspecting congregation. He described this as “inhuman” and said that a police man was named as being the prime motivator, but clearly no action was taken against him. In his report he indicted 15 police officers including then joint commissioner of police R.D. Tyagi, and 16 police constables for their ‘delinquency’ during the riots. [19]”

Three people have been so far been convicted from the Bombay riots, one of whom, the Shiv Sena MLA Madhukar Sarpotdar, died in 2010 without even serving a single day in prison. Shiv Sena leader Bal

Thackeray, who openly incited violence, on occasions challenged the police to arrest him threatening that the law and order situation will deteriorate in that event, was given a state funeral upon his death. That was closure for the Bombay riot victims.

What about another riot that we know of? The 2002 state-sponsored pogrom carried out by Hindu fanatics in cahoots with the administration [20]. The official estimates claim that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus died, but the unofficial estimates claim that the death toll exceeded 2,000, of which the majority were Muslims. Communalism Combat, a journal edited by civil rights activist Teesta Setalvad, had issued prior warnings about the looming danger of communal violence. Eminent historian Tanika Sarkar points out:

"Each individual feature of Gujarat has been anticipated and experimented with since the Ramjanmabhoomi (Birthplace of God Ram) movement began: in Meerut, Maliana, Bhagalpur, at Ayodhya, Mumbai, Surat, Bhopal, at Manoharpur in Orissa and at countless other places. [21]"

The Hindu mobs had computer printouts of voter registration documents and knew addresses of Muslim-owned properties. Muslim-owned shops were looted and vandalized and shops partially owned by Muslims were also looted and damaged, indicating that preparation had started long before the Godhra incident. Smita Narula, senior South Asia researcher for Human Rights Watch and author of the report India: Gujarat Officials Took Part in Anti-Muslim Violence said:

"What happened in Gujarat was not a spontaneous uprising, it was a carefully orchestrated attack against Muslims. The attacks were planned in advance and organized with extensive participation of the police and state government officials. [22]"

The police aided and abetted the mob in carrying out the violence. In some cases, they were silent spectators and did not interfere while the saffron-clad Hindu mobs proceeded to kill Muslims with swords and sticks. On other occasions, they abetted by masquerading as protectors, only to lead hapless Muslims straight toward a waiting mob.

Ambulances were allowed to pass once they yelled Jai Shri Ram (meaning Hail Ram, indicating the victim is a Hindu). First Information Reports (FIR), the initial complaint made about a crime, were often denied or not recorded. Sometimes the police entered FIRs collectively and did not allow individual names, despite the victims claiming to have recognized the perpetrators. The state tried to cover up its complicity and the role of the Sangh Parivar.

As Tanika Sarkar writes, words like "communal violence" and "massacre" have been too "domesticated," to be used to describe the depravity of the violence. Women in particular were made targets of violence and revenge, according to philosopher Martha Nussbaum:

"Particularly striking were the mass rapes and mutilations of women. The typical tactic was first to rape or gang-rape the woman, then to torture her, and then to set her on fire and kill her. Although the fact that most of the dead were incinerated makes a precise sex count of the bodies impossible, one mass grave that was discovered contained more than half female bodies. [23]"

According to the Human Rights Watch Report [24], "[i]n some cases, pregnant women had their bellies cut open and their fetuses pulled out and hacked or burned before the women were killed."

These atrocities didn't stop Modi from declaring—even as the scale of violence was at its most intense—that the "people of Gujarat have shown remarkable restraint under grave provocation," according to the HRW report. The then Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee said in April 2002:

"[W]herever Muslims are living, they don't want to live in harmony. They don't mix with the society. They are not interested in living in peace... We don't need lessons in secularism from anyone. India was secular even before the Muslims and Christians came. [25]" Atal Behari Vajpayee was given a Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian honour an Indian can get, on March 27, 2015. His birthday, December 25, is now declared to be "Good Governance Day." No communalism here, if you are raising questions, you are probably not nationalistic enough, and would be well served if you relocated to Pakistan.

More than 200,000 people were internally displaced, in Gujarat in the aftermath of 2002 pogrom. Muslims fled riot-prone neighbourhoods in search of shelter from the unspeakable violence. The state turned a blind eye to survivors and the relief camps organized for them. Not only did the state provide inadequate relief, it refused to acknowledge the relief camps set up by international organizations and Indian nongovernmental organizations that did make efforts to address the humanitarian crisis. It has also been reported that in some cases, the relief camps were organized near graveyards, and some victims even had to sleep between graves. While the plight of Muslims in the country is such, BJP MP and current External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj has assured, on August 2, 2015, to help Hindus in Pakistan [26].

In a sting operation, Tehelka recorded a video where former Bajrang Dal leader Babubhai Patel, also known as Babu Bajrangji, said:

"We didn't spare a single Muslim shop, we set everything on fire ... we hacked, burned, set on fire ... we believe in setting them on fire because these bastards don't want to be cremated, they're afraid of it ... I have just one last wish ... let me be sentenced to death ... I don't care if I'm hanged ... just give me two

days before my hanging and I will go and have a field day in Juhapura where seven or eight lakhs [seven or eight hundred thousand] of these people stay ... I will finish them off ... let a few more of them die ... at least 25,000 to 50,000 should die. [27]"

In the video Babu Bajrangi also claimed "that he had called the state Home Minister Gordhan Zadaphia and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad general secretary Jaideep Patel at the time, to inform them about the killings." He has been given life imprisonment, but has been out on bail for more than 125 days, and was granted a bail six times—sometimes for niece's wedding, sometimes for medical reasons—the last time on July 23, 2015.

The other person convicted for Gujarat 2002 was Maya Kodnani. She has been described by court rulings as 'the kingpin of Naroda Patiya massacre.' She has been given a sentence of 28 years in jail. The Gujarat government withdrew their appeal to seek death penalty for Kodnani. Here, so there is no misunderstanding, I would like to reiterate that even for criminals like Maya Kodnani and Babu Bajrangi, I vociferously oppose death penalty.

How can one expect closure of the Gujarat 2002 pogrom, when Himanshu Trivedi, who was a judge in the City Civil and Sessions Court from October 2002 to May 2003, in a recent facebook post came out saying that he quit judiciary because the State of Gujarat wanted the judges to act against the minority community? [28]

In the case of the Malegaon blasts of 2006, the initial suspicion was that Pakistan or Lashkar-e-Toiba or Jaish-e-Mohammed were involved in the blasts. Among those arrested were activists of Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). After Hemant Karkare's investigation found that the initial Muslim men suspected were innocent, the case was handed over to National Investigative Agency (NIA). When it was found that the accused are no longer Maoists, Muslims, or does not fit a description which can be used to declare them a national enemy or 'greatest internal security threat,' the situation became complicated. Special Public Prosecutor Rohini Salian has come out saying that after the change in the central government, there has been more pressure to favour the accused.

In the case of the grenade attack on a Friday prayer gathering at the Ahle Hadees mosque in Peer Mitha on January 9, 2004, which had left two J&K officials dead and 19 injured, the Jammu police initially blamed Tehreek-ul Mujahideen, and arrested 108 people. As reported in an Indian Express article:

"Seven years later, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) had said Rajendra Chaudhary and Dhan Singh, arrested in connection with the 2007 Samjhauta Express attack and the 2008 Malegaon blasts, were behind the attack. In December 2012, an NIA team had questioned two youths from Kanachak in Jammu.

In the light of the NIA disclosures, a re-investigation was ordered, but it never took off because the J&K Police said that the original case file had been "stolen"...

As per the NIA, in a "disclosure statement", Rajendra Chaudhary had said that in 2001 he had met Sunil Joshi, then a pracharak in Mhow, at Depalpur in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh...

"Dhan Singh told me he had come to the camp around two months ago. Sunilji left Jammu after dropping me there. We, three, stayed in that room at Purkhu camp for about three months... Patil showed us two hand grenades kept in his suitcase and asked us to explode them. Along with Dhan Singh and Patil, I went to the mosque at Peer Meetha (around 15 km from our place) by bus. They told me to wait at the local bus stop and went to the mosque. After hurling grenades (I heard the sound of explosion), they both came running to the bus stand. I later came to know that due to that explosion, two persons had been killed and a few injured. Along with Dhan Singh, I returned to Indore, leaving Patil in Jammu. [29]"

This list can go on. There is no closure to the Babri Masjid case, despite the damning evidence provided by the Liberhan Commission report; no closure for the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots; no closure for the victims of the Kunan Poshpora in Kashmir, where according to human rights organizations like HRW about 100 women were gang raped by Indian army personnel; no closure for the Sopore massacre in Kashmir, where Indian army killed 55 civilians, and according to conservative estimates of the government 250 shops and 50 houses were burnt and so on.

The duplicity of the liberal defenders of Modi, BJP and Sangh parivar in general is pathetic. When one raise the question of Gujarat 2002, one is repeatedly accused of being stuck in the past, yet the Sangh Parivar go back thousands of years and search in mythical stories about temples built in particular places. There is a myth going around that Modi has been given a clean chit; well not exactly, as an article in India Resist points out [30]. How can you expect justice, when the perpetrators of Gujarat 2002 pogrom go unpunished, while Teesta Setalvad, whose untiring efforts have helped bring justice to the survivors of the pogrom, is being hounded?

There is another charge that activists only bring up the case of abolition of death penalty when a Muslim man is on death row. That is patently false. As I have mentioned before, I would be opposed to death penalty for Maya Kodnani, or even Henry Kissinger, who probably would be one of the biggest war criminals on earth if ever tried. Committed and principled activists have been fighting for the abolition of death penalty for a long time. We opposed the noose symbol in the Shahbagh movement; we have opposed the death sentence awarder to Muslim Brotherhood's Muhammad Morsi; the order of death penalty to 183 Muslim Brotherhood supporters in Egypt; and now we are opposed to the death penalty of Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam.

Reaction from the political parties

The Congress did not even raise the issue of principled opposition to capital punishment. Given that Sonia Gandhi had earlier forgiven the killer of her husband, she had some moral capital to at least start up a conversation on the issue of mercy and against retributive justice. Although individual Congress leaders, like Digvijay Singh, opposed the hanging of Yakub, the party was largely silent.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) opposed the death penalty of Yakub Memon. Veteran CPI(M) leader Prakash Karat wrote in *The Citizen*, "Yakub Memon's fate underlines the need for the abolition of the death penalty, a demand which the CPI(M) has been making. [31]" The hypocrisy of this statement is palpable. Let us remind ourselves that the West Bengal CPI(M) government had taken an active role in hanging Dhanajoy Chatterjee, with the Meera Bhattacharya—the wife of the then Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya—taking the lead role. As remarked upon earlier, new evidence has surfaced, which casts doubt on the role of Dhanajoy, and it might have been a wrongful execution. Upon the hanging of Afzal Guru, convicted for being involved in the parliament attack in 2001, Sitaram Yetchury, who is currently the General Secretary of CPI(M), had said "I think, the law of the land with all its provisions has finally been completed as far as the Afzal Guru case and the attack on the Indian Parliament is concerned. The issue which had been lingering for the past 11 years has finally completed its due course. [32]"

Arundhati Roy noted then: "In a moment of rare unity the Nation, or at least its major political parties, the Congress, the BJP and the CPM came together as one (barring a few squabbles about 'delay' and 'timing') to celebrate the triumph of the Rule of Law. [33]"

After the December 16 horrific incident of rape of a Delhi woman, Prakash Karat commented: "As per the present laws, capital punishment is prescribed for cases of murder and Supreme Court has defined it or interpreted it as the rarest of rare cases when death penalty can be given...of course, in the case of the brutal gang rape and murder of this young woman, that law would apply. [34]" Though, given what I noted earlier, CPI(M)'s deep historical commitment to fighting capital punishment is hard to find, I think it is a welcome development that at least now they have an official position of opposing death penalty as a legitimate means of punishment, and in the case of Yakub Memon had openly opposed it.

Conclusion

With the change in the central government, there is a process of Hinduization of institutions and society playing out, with a precipitous increase in communal disharmony. There is a spate of activity of "shuddhikaran", "gharwapsi", attacks on churches all of which barely receive any comments from Prime Minister Modi. In a report, which came out marking the 100 days of Narendra Modi's government, John Dayal notes that there have been more than 600 incidents of communal violence since the new BJP government came into power [35]. From declaring the Gita to be the national book, to making political appointments of people with ties to the Sangh Parivar, the current BJP government—when not actively stoking communal tension—conveniently turns a blind eye to the atrocities.

While we should take a principled position, not only questions of capital punishment, but also on questions of terrorism, and condemn the attack on innocent civilians, whether the victim is in India or a blogger in Bangladesh, we cannot forget that our main battle remains in our own country where we are based. We condemn horrific attacks everywhere else, and write statements of solidarity to groups fighting extremism and bigotry, but our task is to organize on the ground where we are based. It is important for us to fight islamophobia, because it is an important tool at the hands of Hindutva forces, which it will, as it has done in the past, use cynically to gain political power at the cost of innocent human lives from either sides of the religious line.

11 August 2015

[Radical Socialist](#)

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Philippines- The War Is Over

In the Philippines, one of the world's longest running communist insurgencies is being worn down by the passage of history.

On July 27, thousands gathered in Quezon City to protest during Philippine President [Benigno Aquino III's](#) state of the nation address (SONA). The SONA protests are a recurring show of force for the Philippine left, the strongest left in southeast Asia.

Every year demonstrators gather to denounce issues ranging from inequality and poverty, to human rights violations and corruption. As has also become tradition, two marches, each of comparable size, took place — one inspired by the underground Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the other consisting of everybody else.

Benedict Anderson wrote that the turbulent history of the Philippines gives observers a feeling of "[historical vertigo](#)," and the SONA protests are no exception — they are a dazzling condensation of historical periods.

The "broad" march is just that, broad, and includes Marxist-Leninists, progressive NGOs, feminist collectives, and anyone else who cares to join, while the other march, more ideologically homogeneous and representing the "national-democratic" line, seems strangely out of time. Placards and banners denounce the government as the "fascist running dog of US imperialism," and graffiti urges youths to join the "people's war" in the countryside.

As the SONA protests make clear, the national-democrats remain by far the strongest current on the Philippine left, and while Maoism has largely disappeared in the region, the CPP remains at the head of mass movement. Party membership is in the ten thousands and its armed wing, the [New People's Army \(NPA\)](#), has thousands of regulars. The CPP's political line is followed by a wide network of underground and legal formations that reach out to, and organize, millions of Filipinos.

The sustained significance of the CPP current, which holds at the core of its worldview the idea that nothing important has changed in Philippine society since 1945, is puzzling. Its rhetoric seems dated, its theoretical framework the same as it was at its foundation decades ago.

There are obvious reasons for people to protest the status quo in the Philippines. It has the highest income disparity in Asia and around a quarter of the 100 million Filipinos lives on less than \$1 a day. "Torture and other ill-treatment" by the police are rife, and journalists and activists risk being murdered by gunmen who are never brought to justice. Politics and key sectors of the economy are dominated by wealthy families, some of whom have been in power since the Spanish colonial era.

But why is so much of the discontent over these conditions channeled into support for the CPP with its Cold War mentality and rhetoric, rather than other organizations? To start answering this question, it is necessary to look at [the roots](#) of "the world's longest running communist insurgency."

Roots of the Insurgency

The founding congress of the Communist Party of the Philippines wasn't very promising. Twelve activists met in early 1969 in Luzon, the largest island of the Philippine archipelago. The attendants, who decided that the official date of the congress should be pre-dated to December 26 — Mao Zedong's birthday — were led by Jose Maria Sison, a young university lecturer and son of landowners. Sison was a member of the underground Partido Komunista Pilipinas (PKP).

During the Japanese occupation and after, the PKP led a powerful guerrilla-movement, the Huks (short for Hukbalahap or Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon, the Nation's Army Against the Japanese). But a bid for power by the PKP had been defeated in the 1950s, and most of its leaders were still in prison, leaving the party searching for a way to legally operate again.

Sison had been tasked by his party to organize a new youth movement, the Kabataan Makabayan (Nationalist Youth). Protesting social inequality, Philippine support for the US war against Vietnam, and the increasing authoritarianism of president [Ferdinand Marcos](#), the group grew rapidly. Encouraged by their growing

movement, Sison and other young radicals soon grew impatient with the cautious course of the PKP, and broke with the party, linking up with a remnant of the Huks to restart the armed struggle. They billed the founding of their CPP as a "refoundation" of the authentic communist party.

Under his alias Amado Guerrero (Beloved Warrior) Sison wrote a book — [Philippine Society and Revolution](#) — that remains the core ideological text of the movement. In it he offers a capsule overview of Philippine history in which everything points to a coming revolution, to be led by the CPP. The CPP is guided by "Mao Tsetung Thought which is the acme of Marxist-Leninism in this world era," in which "imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is advancing towards worldwide victory."

Sison declared that the economic "backwardness" of the Philippines was "principally determined by US imperialism" which had blocked the "natural development" of a self-sufficient economy, keeping the country in a "semi-feudal, semi-colonial" condition. Sison's revolutionary strategy flowed directly from this analysis: a rural guerrilla-war along Maoist lines in which a peasant army would encircle the cities and seize power.

When president Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972, he cited the threat of the communist guerrillas as one of his reasons. In reality, the guerrillas numbered a few dozen at the time, even though early 1970 had seen the ["First Quarter Storm,"](#) a series of large and militant protests that helped radicalize a new generation of revolutionaries in which the Nationalist Youth and other radical groups played an important part.

Marcos exaggerated the strength of the fledgling CPP/NPA, but after he declared Martial Law, the Maoists did actually become the premier force in the anti-dictatorship movement. Whereas other opposition forces were swept away by the repression and the PKP surrendered to the dictator, the CPP had been preparing for underground struggle and was able to keep part of its cadre out of the hands of the state and continue organizing.

In the following years, the CPP/NPA grew steadily and cultivated networks across the country. The guerrillas were unable to defeat the state but they provided shelter and a base for organizers who were driven underground. Its continuing attacks gave the lie to Marcos's claims to have brought stability to the country. Guerrilla attacks, urban protests, strikes, and rebellions by the country's Muslim minority whittled away support for the regime, and more and more Filipinos saw only two options — Marcos or the CPP-led national-democrats.

Marcos's power rested on a bloc of different forces. Cronies who used their connection with the state to increase their economic power provided important support to his regime, as did the increasingly politicized army, technocrats and the United States. As the Philippine economic situation worsened in the seventies and early eighties, the political crisis also grew, coming to a head with the 1984 assassination of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, the leader of the liberal opposition.

Marcos called for new elections in early 1986 in which he ran against Corazon "Cory" Aquino, widow of Ninoy Aquino (the current president is the son of Cory and Ninoy). After Marcos rigged the vote, a rebellion broke out in the army, which gathered massive civilian support in the ["People Power Revolution."](#) In February 1986 the dictator fled to Hawaii and Cory Aquino was declared president.

Rejection and Reaffirmation

Despite its earlier strength, the CPP found itself isolated by the developments of the 1980s. It had called for a boycott of the elections that led to the People Power Revolution — just like it had done for previous elections — but this time, the boycott call went largely unheeded, and even national-democratic activists campaigned for Cory Aquino. The party later criticized the boycott call as a mistake.

The boycott was a symptom of a faulty analysis. The party had dismissed the possibility that the ruling class of the Philippines could stay in power other than through a dictatorship. For a long time this was true — for years the liberal opposition seemed unable to offer an alternative, lacking a strong social base and unprepared for repression. But the situation gradually changed. Worried by the growth of the CPP, elements in the US state (especially in the State Department) started supporting the liberal opposition and Marcos cronies started to jump ship.

The unraveling of Marcos's coalition accelerated after Ninoy's assassination. This shift in US foreign policy had been declared impossible by the CPP which, based on their conception of imperialism, argued that the US needed Marcos to exploit the country. With the restoration of formal democracy under Aquino, most of the middle class that had sympathized with the national-democrats turned their backs on the revolutionaries while many among the movement's popular base doubted whether continuing the armed struggle was opportune.

After his release from prison in 1986 by Aquino, Sison reassumed the role of party chair, but along with other CPP leaders he misread the political situation. The CPP had alienated many of its sympathizers with its boycott call and the movement was also heavily damaged by revelations that hundreds of CPP members and sympathizers had been killed in witch hunts for government spies.

In 1987, elite democracy started stabilizing, but as late as 1990 Sison insisted that there was a “revolutionary flow” in the country. CPP leaders thought there were large opportunities for the movement to grow and that the government lacked popular support. The NPA was ordered to launch more offensives. After the breakdown of a ceasefire in 1987 the Aquino government declared “total war” on the rebels and inflicted heavy losses on the increasingly isolated communists.

The misfortunes of the CPP led to intense debate, in which Sison played a central role. In self-exile in the Netherlands since 1987, Sison argued that experiments with tactics like urban insurrection and other deviations from the Maoist line had supposedly led to the defeats and demanded a return to the directives of Philippine Society and Revolution.

Under a new pseudonym — Armando Liwanag (roughly meaning “Armed with Light”) — he accused his opponents of treason, sending denunciations of them to bourgeois newspapers. Though it came at a heavy price — around half of the national-democratic movement left in the early nineties — Sison’s camp eventually won.

Much of the Left in the Philippines, from social democrats to the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines, has roots in the 1990s splits of the national-democratic movement. Collectively, the Left outside the CPP orbit is sometimes still referred to as RJs — short for Rejectionists: those who rejected Sison’s “reaffirmation” of Maoism. The CPP-aligned left are the RAs – Re-Affirmists, and today, the RAs are equal in number to all the RJ groups put together.

How did the RAs win the inner party struggle? Part of the explanation lies in the fact that the opposition failed to form a united front: it had agreed about what it was against but not what it favored. Another part of the explanation is the way Sison skillfully used anger over the witch hunts against his opponents — he was in prison during the worst of the killings, though he was certainly aware of the hunts for spies.

Prominent members of the opposition had been leaders of the CPP in the southern island of [Mindanao](#) , where the majority of the victims were killed, and they carry a deep responsibility for the torture and murders that were part of the so-called “anti-deep penetration agent operations.” Sison tied the crimes of these witch hunts together with political objections to the Maoist strategy as symptoms of a “petty-bourgeois” mindset. The reasoning was axiomatic: whoever follows the Maoist line is a proletarian, whoever disagrees with it is at best petty-bourgeois — and by implication an enemy of the revolution if they refuse “proletarian” leadership.

Most importantly, Sison’s insistence that there was no reason to change strategy after the fall of Marcos rang true for many activists, especially those in the countryside. In the cities, the restoration of formal democracy opened up new possibilities for organization and agitation but in the countryside much remained the same.

Rural poverty persisted and Aquino’s promised land reforms made little difference. In the countryside there was no decline in state violence, and when Aquino declared “total war” against the Left already in early 1987 human rights violations there increased. Aquino gave a blanket amnesty to perpetrators of human rights violations under Marcos and continued the use of paramilitary groups against the Left. The increased military operations led to a growing number of internally displaced people.

In this context, Sison’s call to return to Maoist basics, to the strategy that had supposedly guided the building of the national-democratic mass movement, seemed to make sense to many rural Filipinos.

In reality, the movement’s builders had often deviated from the Maoist approach. Early in its history, the CPP adopted a model of “centralized command, decentralized operations.” The idea was that party units should have a large degree of autonomy so that they would be able to continue to organize even if they lost contact with the national leadership. The “central leadership” was embodied in party committees that ensured ideological adherence. This meant that innovations remained at a local level, tolerated as long as they were successful and could be combined with a formal adherence to the Maoist strategy.

A Maoist discourse became synonymous with revolutionary theory. Experiences that did not fit the mold remained local, were never theorized nor made part of the official memory of the party and the idea that the rise of the CPP could be attributed to the strategy espoused by Sison remained dominant. As founding chair of the party, who had faced torture and solitary confinement after his arrest in 1976, he still commanded respect.

Some of Sison’s prescriptions also made sense. The NPA was directed to retreat, to concentrate less on engaging the army and police and more on organizing. Depending on their skills, the guerrillas provided medical support and education to people, set up mutual aid structures for peasants, and helped them with their daily work.

For many veteran rebels, this felt like a return to the kind of work that had enabled the NPA to grow nationwide. By the late nineties, the CPP had stabilized. It had become much more ideologically homogeneous, though it was considerably smaller than it had been in the mid-eighties.

The Struggle Today

It is difficult to determine how large the CPP/NPA is today. CPP statements put NPA strength at over 6,000 but below 10,000, while the Philippine government claims there are 4,000 NPAs left. In 2013, the CPP

declared that previous estimates of the size of the NPA in the mid-eighties were incorrect. Fully armed fighters supposedly never numbered over 6,100, far less than the figure of 25,000 many observers had thought constituted the high point of the NPA.

The statement was intended to minimize the weakening of the NPA but inadvertently revealed the movement's weakness. The party's newspaper *Ang Bayan* claims a steady increase in the size of the NPA and the number of attacks it organizes, but plays down the losses it sustains. The CPP quietly abandoned its 2009 plan to reach "strategic stalemate," in which the NPA would be able to match the government army by 2014: more recent statements give a longer, vaguer (five to ten years) time frame in which to meet its goals.

Yet the movement retains strong civilian support, as millions of Filipinos support the national-democrats. Underground national-democratic organizations are part of the [National Democratic Front of the Philippines \(NDFP\)](#). The NDFP promotes itself as a united front of over a dozen mass-organizations but is directly controlled by the CPP. The government and the NDFP both declare to be willing to engage in peace negotiations but talks regularly collapse with each side accusing the other of a lack of sincerity.

One way to estimate support for the national-democratic movement is by looking at the votes gathered by the legal national-democratic organizations. The Philippine House of Representatives is mostly elected in a first-past-the-post system but 20 percent of seats are elected by a type of proportional representation, and allotted to party lists. The structure is designed to give geographically dispersed, underrepresented groups like poor peasants or women a chance to be represented by specific party lists.

Since 2001, national-democrats have been participating with their own party lists, organized in the *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (New Nationalist Alliance) or *Bayan*. In the 2013 elections, *Bayan* got a little over 3 million votes, good for seven seats. Obviously, not everyone who votes for this alliance supports the CPP, and it's also likely that fraud and intimidation by members of the ruling class cost the alliance votes, but regardless, *Bayan* leads the minority in the Lower House.

The CPP electoral strategy is in accordance with the Maoist strategy of a [two-stage revolution](#) in which a nationalist, anti-imperialist revolution, in alliance with a part of the bourgeoisie, is followed by a socialist revolution. There are stories circulating in the Philippine left that some CPP leaders feel uneasy with the electoral campaigns since the official line maintains that elections are a sham.

Another reason for the unease is the national-democratic approach of allying with whomever offers the best chance to win seats — an approach that in 2010 saw them ally with "Bongbong" Marcos, son of the late dictator, to support millionaire businessman [Manny Villar](#) in his bid to win the presidency.

Bayan defends a minimum program of wage increases and land reforms but strongly objects to being called "socialist" or "leftist." While the underground movement talks about socialism and capitalism, the CPP has been intellectually stagnant for some time. When it discusses ideology or theory, the CPP often refers to morality rather than to politics. In the CPP tradition, political education largely refers to emphasizing virtues like the willingness to sacrifice, bravery, and putting the collective first.

Its theoretical journal, *Rebolusyon*, has not been published since the end of 2001, and the party's general perspective is instead laid out in regular statements in *Ang Bayan*. These statements, along the lines of "the tide of revolution rises in the Philippines as the economic crisis of the ruling system worsens," are generally just repetitive calls to "intensify the people's war." Thus the paradoxical situation in the Philippines; it is a country with a mass movement led by a Communist party where few people discuss socialism or Marxism.

Intellectual stagnancy is often coupled with violence. The way CPP polemics erase the difference between political disagreement and betrayal have [cleared the way](#) in recent years for assassinations of other left-wing activists by the NPA, and the CPP regards all other left-wing groups in the country as counter-revolutionary.

Leftists varying from the Maoist MLPP to the social-democratic Akbayan party and the Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao have been victims of NPA attacks. The CPP claims these attacks are punishments for "crimes against the people" and were ordered by "people's courts."

The Revolution Exhausted?

Since Cory Aquino, each Philippine president has given a deadline for defeating the CPP/NPA — and has failed. Assassinations and disappearances of people suspected to be CPP sympathizers peaked under the previous president when they appeared to be part of a coordinated counter-insurgency drive. Human rights violations continue, although on a decreased level, under the current president Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III. Much of such repression is on the initiative of military commanders that act with the silent approval of their superiors.

But repression has been unable to break the CPP, whose persistence is rooted in the political economy of the Philippines. The Philippine ruling class is fractured and has failed to modernize their country when compared to other countries in the region. Problems such as rural poverty and landlessness are rampant, enabling the CPP to find rural recruits for its armed insurgency.

No other left group has anything like the means and infrastructure of the national-democrats, who are still so dominant that they are referred to as “the mainstream left.” The CPP movement is also financially self-sustaining through measures like the “revolutionary taxes” collected by the NPA.

The dominance of the national-democrats means that people who are just getting politicized will often most likely come into contact with them first. This way, the national-democrats remain in a position to capture a considerable part of the social dissatisfaction in the country.

Traditionally, the CPP drew many of its leaders from the student movement. In March 2014, the Philippine police arrested [Benito and Wilma Tiamzon](#), the couple that since the nineties had been leading the CPP in the Philippines. Both are veterans of the student movement of the early seventies. The rumored current chair of the party, Rafael Baylosis, is likewise a veteran of the student movement of those days.

Today, the appeal of the intellectually stagnant CPP has decreased but it still manages to attract some students. The moralism of the CPP succeeds in convincing some relatively privileged students that they should, as the Maoist slogan goes, “serve the people.”

The CPP gave many martyrs for the revolutionary cause and the armed struggle hasn’t completely lost its romantic appeal. At the same time, despite its intellectual stagnation, CPP ideology remains quite influential. Other currents of the Philippine left produce little theory and often prefer to keep their ideological differences hidden behind a facade of unity. This means young activists have little access to alternative interpretations of socialism and to perspectives that challenge the CPP discourse.

In the mid-eighties, the national-democratic movement seemed on the verge of taking power — but today this seems like a distant memory. That the NPA had such a modest size when it shook the power of the state in the 1980s illustrates the importance of the open mass movements and support of the urban working class (what the CPP refers to as the “petty bourgeoisie”) the movement enjoyed back then.

But today, the movement is much more rural and isolated than it was at its peak. The NPA is increasingly concentrated in economically stagnant, undeveloped parts of the country such as the northwest of Mindanao, one of the poorest regions of the country. Such regions hold little economic or political interest for the state or for most of capital.

Yet, the CPP still sees all fields of struggle as secondary to the rural armed struggle, despite the shrinking proportion of rural Filipinos. In 1990, over half of the Philippine population lived in the countryside; today only one third do.

Ultimately, these days the Philippine ruling classes are not losing much sleep over the insurgency. The country remains extremely poor, it’s industrial base primarily low-wage and is comparatively underdeveloped, but finding a job in the growing assembling and service sectors or as an “Overseas Filipino Worker” appears to many educated youths a more attractive prospect than joining a decades-old insurgency.

The decline is slow, but despite CPP/NDFP/NPA attempts to forestall irrelevance, “the world’s longest running communist insurgency” is being worn down by the passage of history. But as the SONA protests show, the Philippines is home to a heterogeneous left that reflects a very different experience of social struggle and which continues many of the best traditions of the anti-Marcos resistance.

It is here where our hope and solidarity should rest.

China- An Explosion of Bureaucratic Capital : On the Tianjin Blast

On the 19th August, 2015, the Xinhua News Agency released an interesting report on last week’s Tianjin Ruihai International Logistics storage explosion. While indirectly denying that Li Liang, the nominal chief shareholder of the company, is the nephew of Li Ruihuan, former Standing Committee member of the Politbureau, it confirmed that another chief shareholder, Dong Sheqian, is the son of the former chief of Tianjin Police. It also revealed that the real boss of the company is Yu Xuewei, although his background is still not clear.

“Many intermediary organizations are either government-run, semi-government-run, or joint ventures of the government and private sector.

The reason that the company easily received all the permits necessary for operation despite blatant violation of most rules is because both Dong and Yu colluded with different government departments. The report quotes Dong as saying, “while my connection is chiefly the police and the fire fighting department, Yu has connection with the Production Safety Inspection Bureau, the port management, the customs and the environmental protection bureau.” [\[1\]](#)

Red Hat Agencies

There is yet another player in the game which is neglected in many reports however.

According to the 2001 law on regulating the production and storage of hazardous chemicals, the storage place must be a distance of at least one thousand meters away from residential areas. In the case of the

Ruihai storage place the distance was only 600 meters. Yet, according to China Youth Daily, the Safety Evaluation Report prepared for Ruihai, which allowed it to get the government's permit to operate legally, claims that the storage place's distance from residential areas is in line with the law. [2] The company which issued this report is called Tianjin Zhongbin Haisheng Safety and Health Evaluation Of Detection Co. Ltd, as was shown in its website (and Zhongbin Haisheng hereafter). [3]

According to the 17th August Beijing News, this company is what people may call "hongding zhongjie", or literally "red hat agencies". [4] Hongding was the official hat of high ranking Mandarins under the Qing dynasty, and when these Mandarins also opened their own businesses and become businessmen (shangren), they were called hongding shangren. Red hat agencies are just a special kind of red hat company (hongding gongsi), a code word for commercial companies founded by government officials, either as individuals or collectively. Before we go into this further let us first look at the main shareholders of this profit-making private agency Zhongbin Haisheng.

The forerunner of this company was founded in 2003. There are now three main shareholders of this company: the Tianjin Rubber Industry Institute, the Tianjin Dolphin Rubber Group Co. Ltd., and the National Engineering Research Centre for Fire Protection, an institute under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Security and located at the Tianjin Fire Research Institute. All three shareholders are either state owned enterprises or government departments. The last shareholder only became a shareholder in 2008. The joining of forces with the Tianjin Fire Research Institute under the Ministry of Public Security gave Zhongbin Haisheng a huge advantage in winning the class A qualification for "Safety Evaluation Agencies" in 2012. According to the institute's website, it "runs a world-class integrated fire research and testing base". Obviously its expertise in the field has no bearing on Zhongbin Haisheng's decision to allow Ruihai to pass the safety evaluation when it did not deserve to.

According to the China Youth Daily report, Ruihai had previously asked another agency to make the safety evaluation report, but the agency's report did not give its approval to Ruihai. So Ruihai sought help from Zhongbin Haisheng and the latter gave Ruihai a pass, allowing it to get a government permit to operate.

In China it is a common practice for government departments to appoint particular safety evaluation consultants for applicant companies which wish to operate in the storing or manufacturing of dangerous goods. The applicant companies know very well that they can only get licenses for operating by complying with the demand. Very often these consultants are founded or owned by government officials or their cronies, hence the name "red hat agencies". According to a report, nationally there are now approximately 68 class A and 347 class B safety evaluation agencies. [5]

"Safety evaluations are a game of going through the motions"

The above mentioned Beijing News report dares not directly criticize Zhongbin Haisheng for colluding with Ruihai. Instead it mentions a case which allows us to have a glimpse of how these red hat agencies work and it is therefore worth quoting at length:

"Lots of arguments have been around for some years concerning environmental impact evaluation issues, and how these red hat agencies merely go through the motions when they carry out their evaluations. This problem also exists in the field of safety evaluations. Whereas years ago the laws which governed environmental impact evaluations required openness of information, safety evaluations are still within the category of black-box operations. "

"In practice, and what is also quite common, the consultants who conduct safety evaluations are appointed by the supervisory departments. Previously, CCTV has reported that in Chongqing, all 42 private gas stations sought the same safety evaluation agency to do their reports. The supervisory department, namely the production safety bureau, claimed that it had just 'recommended' the consultant, and did not place any executive order. But since it is this production safety bureau which has the final say on the stations' safety evaluation, which firms will have the guts to ignore the official 'recommendation' and seek an alternative instead?"

"As for safety evaluations, that they are largely a game of going through the motions, is an open secret in the industry. Many companies pay thousands of dollars to get a report to deal with the matter. The safety evaluation of the 42 private gas stations in Chongqing were all done in little more than an hour. The agency staff just walked round the stations for a while and then issued them a safety evaluation report, and charged them 3,000 Yuan." [6]

Government run PR companies lobbying the government

This comment leads us to a discussion of the zhongjie business, literally "intermediary business", which is a special type of industry in China. Surely Chinese consultancy and lobbying businesses or the like are nothing special in their own right? What is special in China is that the zhongjie business is sometimes treated as a single branch of industry, although it includes a wide range of commercial activities, from lobbying, consultancy, intermediary agencies, accounting, auditing, to notary services and authentication and so on. Organizations involved in zhongjie include but are not limited to commercial companies. All kinds of business and trade associations may also fall under this category. If there is anything in common between such a

wide ranges of activities, it is the need for the business sector to either lobby the government or to obtain certain official approval or licenses. Here we enter into the realm of what free-market advocates characterize as rent seeking.

The Chinese bureaucracy, however, from the very beginning, has never been content merely with bribery. Instead it goes one step further by founding their own *zhongjie*, or agencies, to exploit the private capitalists in exchange for facilitating the granting of government's approval or licenses. If one does not do business with these red hat agencies, one will never be able to obtain government approval or permits even if one possesses enough money and qualified technology. This is also why in China the lobbying/consultancy/intermediary/PR services are dominated by government officials or their cronies at every level. For example, China's first public relations company, China Global Public Relations Company, was founded in 1985 by the Xinhua News Agency. This was achieved with the assistance of the world famous PR company Burson-Marsteller. Since then, bureaucrat-run *zhongjie* have sprung up everywhere. When businessmen want to bid for government contracts, all they need to do is to seek the help of these government department run agencies to lobby the very same government department.

In 2009, the Academy of Social Sciences published a report *Research on Corruption in Social Intermediary Organizations and the Relevant Countermeasures*. It points out that:

"In China, commercial bribery, corruption and rent-seeking from government officials, and also intermediary organizations involved in rent-seeking corruption etc, have been intensifying. In various cases of corruption, there are people who make use of audit reports or financial reports or evaluation reports, legally issued by intermediaries like accountants, appraisers, and trade associations etc, to cover up their illegal acts of corruption. This is also the usual practice of rent-seeking government officials. The acts of corruption of these intermediary organizations are mainly grouped into three categories: bribery and assistance with bribery, money laundering, and participation in the misappropriation of state assets, activities which harm the interests of both the shareholders and the consumers."

"Many intermediary organizations (such as Trade Promotion Associations, the Chambers of Commerce, trade associations, etc) are themselves founded by people who rely on government connections; they are either government-run, semi-government-run, or joint ventures of the government and private sector. Some intermediary organizations sever their links with their former supervisory departments only in appearance, while in practice they are still linked to the departments. Some intermediary organizations are headed by incumbent government officials, or officials may act as consultants or honorary presidents. Retired officials also may play the same roles as incumbent officials do. This situation creates an entity of shared interest between the government and the agencies." [7]

It is common to describe the above phenomenon as customary corruption or collusion between officials and the business sector. The problem with the first characterization is that it is far too vague, while the second assumes the separation between government and business. In China's case government officials are also businessmen. They combine both the coercive power of the state apparatus and the power of money to become rich and powerful at the same time. In the 1930s the CCP criticized the KMT for being the chief representative of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Today this accusation is a thousand times more applicable to the CCP.

The Beijing News comments that the Ruihai safety assessment evaluation issue "should be thoroughly investigated ..., and that these red hat agencies must be smashed, the interest chain behind the scene should be cut off." One can hardly disagree with this, but the problem is by whom should it be investigated? The CCP, since thirty years ago, has been going through the motions of reiterating the ban on government departments and officials founding commercial companies. The result is that the bureaucracy comes up with even more business activities. If the CCP is still capable of self-reform, there would not have been a Tianjin blast in the first place, or any similar disasters.

The CCP is so armed to the teeth and remains so powerful that no forces are yet able to challenge it from the outside. The problem, however, is that the CCP is the biggest enemy of itself. Physics tells us that when a large star is old enough, its core can no longer bear its own weight. Its outer region therefore explodes, followed by its inner core collapsing and imploding and then turning into a black hole. Today's CCP has grown to such a monstrous size and power that its rotten core is also increasingly unable to bear the weight of itself. The Tianjin blast is just one of its outer region explosions before it implodes.

August 20, 2015

[2] Wei Ruihai *chuju anping baogao de gongsi bei zhi shi hongding zhongjie* (The Company which Issued Ruihai with the Safety Evaluation Report is Allegedly Rat Hat Agent)

[5] *Zhongbin Haisheng gongsi fazhan zhanlue yanjiu* (Research on the Development Strategy of Zhongbin Haisheng Company), He Zhaohui, Management and Economics Department, University of Tianjin, 2011.

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Youth Camp- Tremendous success of the 32nd International Youth Camp in Belgium!

The 32nd International Youth Camp of the Fourth International took place in Belgium between July 26th and August 1st. The Socialistische Arbeiderspartij – Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (SAP-LCR), Belgian section of the Fourth International, took the initiative to organize this year's youth camp. The camp was held in the natural park Hoge Rielen, a lovely location for a week of political exchanges between revolutionaries from Europe and worldwide. Participants came from Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Spanish State, Switzerland, United States and Western Sahara. All political aspects of the camp were self-organized by the youth participants who themselves established the programme. From the balance sheet that was made within each delegation and brought in common at the last meeting of the political coordination of the camp, we have tried to give an overview of the most remarkable highlights.



A first highlight of the camp concerns the work that was done on ecological struggles and the need for an ecosocialist political project. During the second thematic day that was dedicated to ecology, the Belgian Daniel Tanuro, member of the leadership of the SAP/LCR and author of the book "Green capitalism: why it can't work", opened the camp work on ecology with an introduction on "what project for society, programme and strategy to face the ecological emergency". [1] During the rest of the week, a working group on the COP21 met with the aim of building common initiatives to strengthen and radicalize the climate mobilizations around the COP21 in Paris at the end of the year. This camp activity resulted in a common appeal for mobilization from the delegations: « 99% stand for Climate: Our Planet, not your Business ! ». [2]

The strategic debates about the political situation in Greece can be considered as a second big success of the good course of the program. A delegation of youth of OKDE-Spartakos, the Greek section of the Fourth International and forming part of the radical-left coalition Antarsya, was present at the youth camp to open the debate about the situation in Greece. The position defended by the Greek section was that of the need of an independent coalition of revolutionaries with a programme that breaks with European and Greek capitalism and opens the way to socialism. However, this political line did not convince all the participants who in many cases, in their own country, form part of broader political projects in common front with "reformists" such as the Danish Red-Green Alliance or Podemos in the Spanish State. The most important issue that was brought forward by the critical voices was that of the need to organize the 62% "No"-voters in the referendum into a political alternative; an alternative to the turn to austerity politics by the leadership of Syriza, who had just signed an austerity memorandum with the EU institutions and with the IMF. Noticing with great concern that the shift to the right of the Tsipras government goes with a repression against the radical left, the participating delegations adopted a solidarity declaration with the condemned anti-memorandum protesters of July 15th. [3]

A third highlight of the camp was situated at the end of the day on LGBTQ struggles. After a strong rally with powerful speeches the LGBTQ party started. Already a tradition of the international youth camps, the party aims to provide LGBTQ persons and all participants who are open for new, other than heterosexual, experiences with a space where they can express freely. The tolerant and free environment contrasts with the dominant heteronormativity and homophobia in most party places and in everyday life in society in general. No revolution without sexual liberation!

Fourth, the "interdelegation meetings" were a great success. They provided an excellent opportunity to exchange experiences in struggles with delegations from different countries. Some subjects of presentations and discussions between delegations were the evolution of Podemos in the Spanish State; the earthquakes within the British left (with the collapse of the Socialist Workers Party, the creation of Left Unity, the growth of the Scottish National Party and the campaign for a left leadership within Labour with the candidature of Jeremy Corbyn); the struggle against the third austerity memorandum in Greece; the struggles against big and for society useless infrastructure projects in Italy such as the HST-line Lyon-Turin and the World Exhibition in Milan; the strike movement in Belgium with the action plan of the labor unions against the right-wing government; etc.



It is precisely for these “interdelegations”, as well as for the internationalist meeting, the many workshops and the informal contacts in the course of the camp week, that the presence of extra-European delegations is highly appreciated. This year, the camp was able to welcome a delegation from the Western Sahara, a territory that is occupied by Morocco – with the support of France in the Security Council of the UN – for the theft of its natural resources. The comrades form part of the left-wing of the Polisario Front that struggles for the national anticolonial liberation of the Western Sahara. The participation of an Egyptian delegation was also foreseen, but the restrictive European border policies impeded that they could obtain a visa.

The outstanding internationalist dynamics of the youth camp, this year with 318 participants, will continue next year with the 33th International Youth Camp of the Fourth International in... the Spanish State! The camp will be organized by Anticapitalistas, organisation that co-founded Podemos and became meanwhile the most important referent for the anticapitalist left within the broader political project. If the political enthusiasm – and creative atmosphere! - of this year’s delegation of the Spanish State can find a translation into an equally engaged and cheerful camp organization, next year’s international youth camp will become a not-to-be-missed rendezvous, and a priority for the youth organizations of the Fourth International!

Footnotes

[1] The written version of Daniel Tanuro’s introduction (in French): [Face à l’urgence écologique : projet de société, programme, stratégie](#). International Viewpoint will publish an English translation shortly.

[2] The call for mobilization: [“99% stand for Climate: Our Planet, not your Business!”](#).

[3] [Solidarity declaration with the anti-memorandum protesters of July 15th in Greece](#).

Climate Change- The struggle against the effects of climate change and for solidarity

Badrul Alam, a representative of the BKF-BKS movement in Bangladesh, was in France in June 2015 and was interviewed by Pierre Rousset.

You came to France at the invitation of the Confederation paysanne to participate in the mobilization in Amiens on June 17, in defence of peasant activists on trial for their action against the “farm of a thousand cows”.

We wanted to affirm an international solidarity with the Confederation and its members dragged before the courts for a struggle - in the face of giant industrial farms - which we fully support. Like the Confederation, we are a member of La Via Campesina. I represented in Amiens our twin associations, the BKF-BKS comprising some two million peasants in Bangladesh, half men (in the BKF) and half women (in the BKS). Having two parallel organizations has facilitated the integration of peasant women, it being understood that the husbands cannot join the BKF unless they accept that their wives should do the same with the BKS. Agro-industry imposes its law at the international level and it is very important that our solidarity is stated at this level. Via Campesina has sections both in the North (as in France) and the South (as in Bangladesh).

Before Amiens, you participated, in Montreuil, in the international meeting preparing the actions during the conference on climate change to be held in Paris next December.

We do not trust the governments and global institutions to curb global warming. However, Bangladesh is one of the countries most immediately affected by the effects of global warming. It is situated on a flat and low delta, at the confluence of the Jamuna (Ganges), Padma (Brahmaputra) and Meghna rivers. It is a region with very fertile soils through the deposits of alluvium, but threatened by floods: the major part of the territory is at least 12 meters in height – of which 10% is located below sea level, under the protection of dykes. In addition, the population density is especially high: we are the 94th biggest country by surface,

but the 8th biggest by population. By and large we have a population density more than twice that of the Netherlands - for a population of approximately 160 million! So any rise in the ocean level and any extreme climatic phenomenon has dramatic consequences. We are truly on the front line in terms of climate!

To the overall effects of the contemporary capitalist mode of development on climate change, we must add its local effects. Let us take the example of the large-scale production, in the south-west of Bangladesh, of shrimp destined, inter alia, to the European market. The dikes in the polders have been opened and the very rich land where poor peasants were working has been drowned under sea water to create pools for breeding.

In the short term, the villagers have benefited from an attractive income through aquaculture; but this industry has destroyed coastal vegetation (mangroves and so on) as well as the biodiversity which was a refuge and a natural protection against the assaults of the ocean. It caused salinization of surrounding lands and their desertification, rendering it unfit for cultivation. As for the shrimp, they are now victims of infectious diseases. The "market" doesn't care: if necessary, capital will bring destruction elsewhere. But the local population is sunk into poverty.

This problem is in fact not recent, it dates back to the early 1990s. In a region where shrimp aquaculture has been developed, nine villages resisted, under the impetus of a woman who was murdered by the police. These villages have become an island of greenery, biodiversity, an example of food sovereignty, a living condemnation of the agro-industry. It is this type of struggle in which we are engaged for the defence of the peasantry, but also precarious workers, street vendors and the urban poor or indigenous peoples (Adivasis).

We have provided aid to the textile workers who were victims of the collapse in Dhaka of the Rana Plaza industrial building in 2013 (aid to the hospitalized first, and then the purchase of sewing machines for women workers with lifetime disabilities), or to villages affected by floods or exceptional cold in the north. We have been able to carry out these actions, particularly thanks to the financial assistance that the association Europe solidaire sans frontières (in France) has been able to send us. Aid to the victims of humanitarian disaster - industrial, climatic - has become more and more a part of the tasks of the BKF-BKS.

As in many other countries of the South, we are also helping occupations of land left in fallow by big landowners (or whose ownership is disputed). A special feature in Bangladesh is that these lands occupied by the poor peasants are often big strips of sands appearing in the meanders of the rivers and can change location with time.

Can you tell us about the "caravans" that you have organized in the past few years?

For four years, we have organized Caravans for climate justice, food sovereignty and the rights of women, gender equality, in order to emphasize the interaction between all these areas. On November 14, 2014, the caravan first went through a good part of Bangladesh before travelling to India, and then back up to Nepal to participate in a regional people's summit. Our caravans have always included foreign delegations from, in particular, other Asian countries (India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Indonesia and the Philippines), but also Europe and elsewhere (this year the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, the United States and Australia). We have expanded our links including through participation in the sessions of the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) in Manila, in the Philippines.

At each of the twelve stages of our caravan, we organize debates and seminars with the local population, so as to multiply exchanges and awareness of the importance of climate change issues and the role played by agro-industry, such as the dissemination of GMOs. We have promoted local varieties of seeds and smallholder agriculture, studied the use of solar energy (and other sources of renewable energy), fertilizers and organic pesticides, or the organic production of pineapples and taken into account the claims of agricultural labourers. In Calcutta, in India, we have met with associations of the urban poor. In Katmandu, Nepal, the movements met to present their alternatives and responses to the climate crisis.

Over the exchanges, our common problems have emerged, faced with the hoarding of land in the hands of the rich, the consequences of the industrialization of agriculture, indebtedness, sexual discrimination (with particularly the double working day, in the fields and at home), the disruption of the climate.

Being in India and Nepal was particularly important. There is a growing cooperation, under the current Prime Minister of India, Modi, between the ruling circles in India and Bangladesh. There is a need to strengthen the cooperation of the popular movements and, in particular, between member associations of La Via Campesina. In addition, the border between our two countries is the subject of tensions, exacerbated by migration due to climate disorder; we must combat the rise of xenophobia, reinforce feelings of solidarity, the belief that we must unite in the face of adversity. To do this, we must meet.

We are confronted by a hardening of regimes that restrict freedom of movement. Thus, a visa has been required by the Indian authorities of Bangladeshis to let them go to Nepal, which was not possible and some of the members of the Caravan were not able to participate in the final stage. It was a great frustration, after such a path!

We will not organize the next caravan this year, but in 2016. We have also proposed a mobilization against the construction of a nuclear power plant planned by the government in collaboration with Russia.

In all these areas, the coordination of popular movements at the international level is we believe essential.

François Vercammen (1944-2015) - Internationalist, theoretician and activist

François Vercammen longstanding leader of the Fourth International and its Belgian section died on June 16 2015. Previous tributes were published by International Viewpoint shortly after his death [here](#). Here we publish the contribution of Jan Malewski, editor of Inprecor and member of the Bureau of the Fourth International made at the memorial meeting held in Brussels on July 3.

I met François in July 1980, but from 1991-92 onwards I had the pleasure of working under his guidance, when Ernest Mandel convinced him to come and work at the International Bureau in Paris. Having already been a professional revolutionary for thirty years at that point, François had thought he should "recycle himself", get a stable job and leave the leadership to younger comrades...

Coming several days a week to Paris, he often spent the night with us or at Alain Krivine's place. There was then the opportunity to discuss without an agenda, and also to take the time to talk quietly, to share what we had been reading.

Working with François was a pleasure. He had that ability – which is so rare – to encourage others to have confidence in themselves. He listened to those with whom he spoke, helping them to formulate their ideas better... I never saw him devalue someone, even if he thought that their rantings didn't make any sense... He let the other person speak, even if it took some time, then one or two weeks later, he asked a question that forced them to think again about what they had put forward in discussion with him...

In the leadership of the International, François had participated from 1981 to 1985, along with Pierre Rousset, in the creation of the International Institute for Research and education in Amsterdam. As Sally and Pierre Rousset wrote, it was a centre "where activists coming from five continents and belonging to political currents with a diversity of traditions could meet together for several months to study, to go over together all the past history of socialist struggle, to reflect on their own experiences of struggles and the lessons from them. (...) So in many respects, the Amsterdam Institute's sessions represented a shared experience of pluralism within the radical Left - a pluralism which is also an essential component of internationalism." [1] François shared this opinion.

In charge of Europe within the International from 1992, he was one of those who – along with Alain Krivine and Roseline Vachetta, MEPs elected in 1999, and with European activists of the International – initiated cooperation between organizations "on the left of the left", combative trade unionists and social movements, in a pluralistic context. This led to regular meetings of the European Anti-Capitalist Left - the EACL. It was a pluralistic framework. It also contributed to getting activists from organizations which in their own countries rubbed shoulders without really working together, to begin to exchange ideas and sometimes take steps to regroup. For example, at a meeting of the European Anti-Capitalist Left in Paris in 2003, a dozen Greek organizations were there side by side ... some of them went on to found Syriza and others, later on, Antarsya - two groupings that reversed the tendency of the radical left in that country to splinter.

François was the one who was talking to everyone, going to meet them in their countries, helping them to establish links with each other.

Engaged since he was quite young in the attempt to build a revolutionary party in Belgium and on an international level, François had carefully studied the writings and actions of Lenin. He considered that Lenin had developed, "almost unwillingly, a particular kind of Marxism, revolutionary and operational, whose striking feature was the separation and the specific articulation between the general level (the theory, the general analysis of society, the broad historical perspectives, political forecasts, programmatic and organizational principles) and the particular level (centred on the political orientation, with the conjunctural analysis, the slogans and the demands, the practical system of organization)." [2]

It was such a revolutionary and operational Marxism that François wanted to practise. As a theoretician, he had - like Lenin, he said - "a deep understanding of the subordinate role of any theoretical construct" and sought to identify "the practical meaning of each argument, each theoretical construct." He considered that "the famous 'theoretical flexibility' of Lenin was not a question of pragmatism", that the "sharp turn" was not "circumstantial", that it demanded a reappraisal of arguments at every level, and hence a reorganization of thought " [3]

It was in this framework, during the 1990s, while he was working on regrouping the radical Left in Europe, that François got down to analyzing the transformations of the European Union. The process was at that time accelerating, with the combination of the Single Act (1985) and the Maastricht Treaty (1991-1992). He quickly grasped that "the struggle against neoliberalism and for a social alternative is a struggle against the European Union" and that "in this context, a profound crisis of European institutions seems inevitable; the outcome should not be a falling back on the national framework, but another Europe". [4]

Nearly two decades later, this crisis is taking place, with Greece as weak link, and the referendum to be held on Sunday is an attempt to avoid being trapped in the national framework by fighting for another Europe.

Contrary to the analytical tradition of some Marxists, who considered that in the absence of a unified European bourgeoisie and because of the competition between European capitals, there was no place for a "the nucleus of a real supranational state", François had understood "the fierce determination that drives the most enlightened spheres of the ruling classes to develop a 'political Europe'", "that is to say a class voluntarism, essential for the ruling classes who wanted to control "the explosiveness and all kinds of permanent contradictions that run through the continent." "The establishment of monetary union - he wrote - is the qualitative leap towards the first nucleus of a really supranational state".

At the same time as saying this, he called for opposition to the "Europeanist" ideology relayed by social democracy, to this idealization of a "democratic" Europe. He insisted that "the institutions of the European Union represent a clear break with the bourgeois parliamentary system that is still dominant in the national states", because the European elites seek to remove the "European institutions" from democratic and social pressure and prevent a transfer to the European level of the rights acquired and the impact of national "civil societies". The shocked reaction of members of the "institutions" last week when they learned that Alexis Tsipras had decided to submit their diktat to the vote of the Greek population, shows how much François was right, more than fifteen years ago, to denounce the "authoritarian dimension" of the European Union.

The Union, said Francis, is "not an already constituted national state" and "does not have the vocation to become one" because "it is fundamentally based on inter-governmentalism." But, he added immediately, "this inter-governmentalism goes far beyond superficial and occasional coordination; it takes a permanent form, very articulate and very thorough. From there, and in this framework, there is the creation of the beginnings of a state apparatus of a supranational character."

And he emphasized: "the Council of the Ministers of Finance and Economy is of course based on inter-governmentalism, but through the Treaties, it has acquired a strong autonomy compared to other council meetings of EU ministers and therefore vis-à-vis national governments." It represents "such a degree of 'European' articulation that it can block on its own initiative any social inclinations of a national government." The "negotiations" between the Greek government of Alexis Tsipras and the "institutions" have shown the correctness of the analysis of François.

This fierce determination to understand the projects of the class enemy, of the political apparatuses of the bourgeoisie on a European level, was aimed at formulating strategic hypotheses in order to intellectually arm the European radical Left that François was trying to build. He had arrived at the conclusion that in the state of crisis and decay of the traditional workers' movement, the struggle against the neoliberal offensive would not go through a pan-European mobilization, prepared for and called by the majority trade-union movement, that is by the European Trade Union Confederation, which alone had the material means to do so, but which had decided not to use its potential.

"The optimal variant that remains - he said - is a major social movement (even defensive) in a member country of the EU, whose strength would be enough to inflict a defeat or indeed a retreat on a national government." That is what we have seen happening in Greece, with the electoral victory of Syriza, one of the organizations which, fifteen years ago, participated in the meetings of the European Anti-Capitalist Left, organized by François.

François expected a social crisis to break out and win a partial victory in one country. In such a case, he wrote, "there would be a need for a strategy of transition, which" would 'pose the question of political power 'at the relevant level, that is to say, of Europe."

And he explained that it was necessary to "have known how to prepare politically and programmatically to respond on two levels:

- On the national level, an alternative policy should take shape, reversing radically and visibly, "before the whole of Europe," the priorities in favour of the working class, women and youth, taking immediately a series of social measures in their favour and accompanying measures to protect this political experience. Essentially, it should respond to doubts as to the possibility of organizing such a break on a national level, in an open and Europeanized economy, faced with the hostility of the EU. With two main goals: to find support within the country and to address Europe, its peoples and its popular movements.
- At the EU level, such a government "breaking with the EU" should not leave the EU or denounce the treaties. The goal is to amplify the crisis of the EU by using to the maximum the time and space that the institutional rules of the treaties allow, to generate support and mobilization in Europe so as to unleash an overflowing pressure on other governments of the EU."

Since in such a case, "the governments (especially those of the key countries) would be less ready than ever to put the decision in the hands of the people, strengthening further the authoritarian character of the EU and of political life in the nation states" it will be necessary to put forward "a slogan of general propaganda, namely the convening of a democratic congress of the peoples of Europe. (...) Such an assembly, which can be likened to a Constituent Assembly (although the term can certainly create confusion, depending on the historical traditions of different countries), cannot be sovereign, because this would presuppose as having been acquired a degree of supranationality which has not been so acquired, and which it is necessary to define precisely. It would be necessary, in a second stage, to discuss and take decisions in each of the

countries concerned (those who are today EU members and others who would like to be) in accordance with democratic procedures."

François is no longer here today to help us to work out an orientation for the struggle, in this crisis of the European Union that has begun in Greece. But he left us ideas that must be grasped. I have no doubt that today, had he been alive, he would have done everything to generalize the struggle of the Greek people, to broaden it out in the perspective of another Europe, to help develop the indispensable tactical and strategic responses. It is up to us to continue his fight.

Footnotes

[1] Sally Rousset, Pierre Rousset, ["The IIRE 1982-2007 – II- The first decade"](#).

[2] François Vercammen, ["Lénine et la question du parti – Remarques autour de 'Que faire?'"](#).

[3] [Ibid.](#)

[4] François Vercammen, ["Face aux institutions de l'Union européenne – Eléments sur les aspects institutionnels-étatiques de l'UE"](#).
